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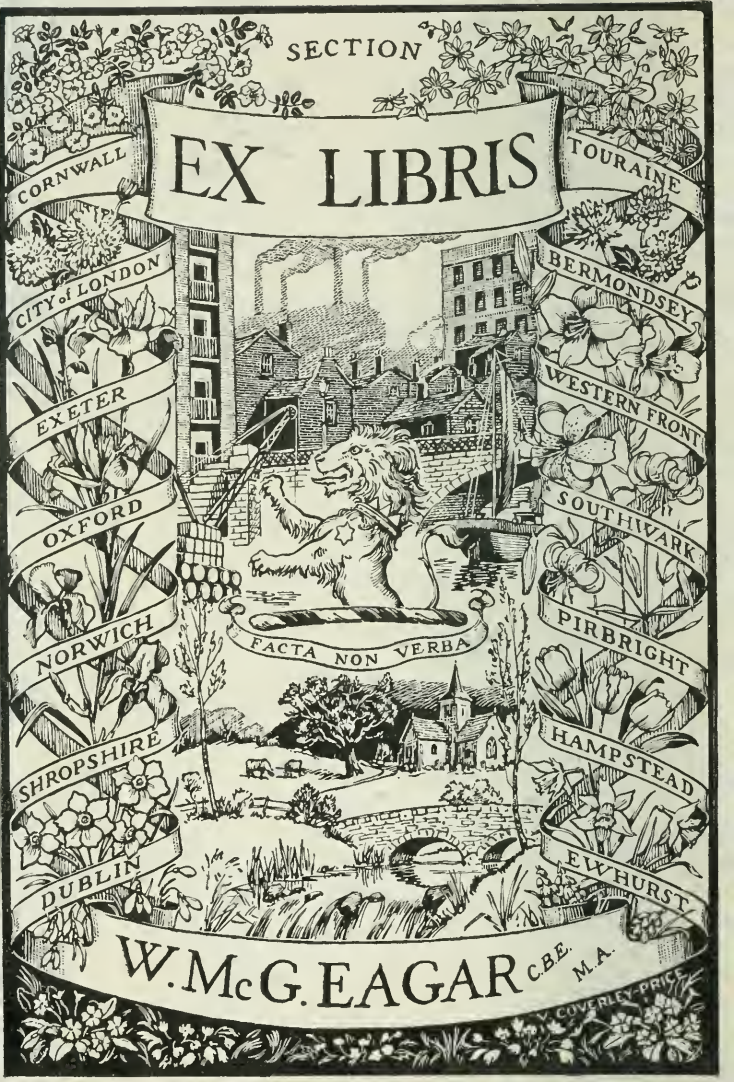
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MEMOIRS

OF

JOHN DRYDEN.

BY SIR WALTER SCOTT.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

PARIS:

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MDCCCXXVI.

NOTICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

The admirers of Sir Walter Scott will be gratified by the separate publication of these Memoirs, which will complete our edition of his works. They are now for the first time published distinct from the works of Dryden, with which, at the price of upwards of eight guineas, they can only be purchased in London. Those who possess old editions of Dryden will find these Memoirs a valuable addition.

Paris, March 15, 1826.

ADVERTISEMENT.

AMONG the most eminent of the illustrious names of those whose genius has done honour to English Literature stands that of Dryden, who may claim at least the third place in the honoured list, and who has given proofs of greater versatility of talent than either Shakspeare or Milton, though justly placed inferior to both in their respective provinces. It would be hard to exact that the Editor of these Memoirs should rival the criticism of Johnson, or produce facts which have escaped the accuracy of Malone. While, however, he has availed himself of the labours of both, particularly of the latter, whose industry has removed

the cloud which so long hung over the events of Dryden's life, he has endeavoured to take a different and more enlarged view of the subject than that which his predecessors have presented. The general critical view of Dryden's works being sketched by Johnson with unequalled felicity, and the incidents of his life accurately discussed and ascertained by Malone, something seemed to remain for him who should consider these literary productions in their succession, as actuated by and operating upon the taste of an age, where they had so predominant an influence; and who might, at the same time, connect the life of Dryden with the history of his publications, without losing sight of the fate and character of the individual. How far this end has been attained, is not for the editor to guess, especially when, as usual at the close of a work, he finds he is possessed of double the information he had when he commenced it. The kindness of Mr Octavius Gilchrist, who undertook a

journey to Northamptonshire to examine the present state of Rushton, where Dryden often lived, and of Mr Finlay, of Glasgow, who favoured the editor with the use of some original editions, fall here to be gratefully acknowledged.

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THE

LIFE

OF

JOHN DRYDEN.

SECTION I.

Preliminary Remarks on the Poetry of England before the Civil Wars—The Life of Dryden from his Birth till the Restoration—His early Poems, including the « Annus Mirabilis. »

The life of Dryden may be said to comprehend a history of the literature of England, and its changes, during nearly half a century. While his great contemporary Milton was in silence and secrecy laying the foundation of that immortal fame, which no poet has so highly deserved, Dryden's labours were ever in the eye of the public; and he maintained, from the time of the Restoration till his death, in 1700, a decided and acknowledged superiority over all the poets of his age. As he wrote from necessity, he was

obliged to pay a certain deference to the public opinion; for he, whose bread depends upon the success of his volume, is compelled to study popularity: but, on the other hand, his better judgment was often directed to improve that of his readers; so that he alternately influenced and stooped to the national taste of the day. If, therefore, we would know the gradual changes which took place in our poetry during the above period, we have only to consult the writings of an author, who produced yearly some new performance, allowed to be most excellent in the particular style which was fashionable for the time. It is the object of this memoir to connect, with the account of Dryden's life and publications, such a general view of the literature of the time, as may enable the reader to estimate how far the age was indebted to the poet, and how far the poet was influenced by the taste and manners of the age. A few preliminary remarks on the literature of the earlier part of the seventeenth century will form a necessary introduction to this Biographical Memoir.

When James I. ascended the throne of England, he came to rule a court and people, as much distinguished for literature as for commerce and arms. Shakspeare was in the zenith of his reputation, and England

possessed other poets inferior to Spakspeare alone; or, indeed, the higher order of whose plays may claim to be ranked above the inferior dramas ascribed to him. Among these we may reckon Massinger, who approached to Shakspeare in dignity; Beaumont and Fletcher, who surpassed him in drawing female characters, and those of polite and courtly life; and Jonson, who attempted to supply, by depth of learning, and laboured accuracy of character, the want of that flow of imagination, which nature had denied to him. Others, who flourished in the reign of James and his son, though little known to the general readers of the present age even by name, had a just claim to be distinguished from the common herd of authors. Ford, Webster, Marston, Brome, Shirley, even Chapman and Decker, added lustre to the stage for which they wrote. The drama, it is true, was the branch of poetry most successfully cultivated; for it afforded the most ready appeal to the public taste. The number of theatres then open, in all parts of the city, secured to the adventurous poet the means of having his performance represented upon one stage or other; and he was neither tired nor disgusted by the difficulties, and disagreeable observances, which must now be necessarily undergone by every candidate for

dramatic laurels.[1] But although, during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and James I., the stage seems to have afforded the principal employment of the poets, there wanted not many who cultivated, with success, the other departments of Parnassus. It is only necessary to name Spenser, whose magic tale continues to interest us, in despite of the languor of a continued allegory; Drayton, who, though less known, possesses perhaps equal powers of poetry; Beaumont the elder, whose poem on Bosworth Field carries us back to the days of the Plantagenets; Fairfax, the translator of Tasso, the melody of whose numbers became the model of Waller; besides many others, who ornamented this æra of British literature.

Notwithstanding the splendour of these great names, it must be confessed, that one common fault, in a greater or less degree, pervaded the most admired poetry of Queen Elizabeth's age. This was the fatal propensity

[1] I do not pretend to enter into the question of the effect of the drama upon morals. If this shall be found prejudicial, two theatres are too many. But, in the present woful decline of theatrical exhibition, we may be permitted to remember, that the gardener who wishes to have a rare diversity of a common flower, sows whole beds with the species; and that the monopoly granted to two huge theatres must necessarily diminish, in a complicated ratio, both the number of play writers, and the chance of any thing very excellent being brought forward.

to *false wit;* to substitute, namely, strange and unexpected connexions of sound, or of idea, for real humour, and even for the effusions of the stronger passions. It seems likely that this fashion arose at court, a sphere in which its denizens never think they move with due lustre, until they have adopted a form of expression, as well as a system of manners, different from that which is proper to mankind at large. In Elizabeth's reign, the court language was for some time formed on the plan of one Lillie, a pedantic courtier, who wrote a book, entitled «Euphues and his England, or the Anatomy of Wit;» which quality he makes to consist in the indulgence of every monstrous and overstrained conceit, that can be engendered by a strong memory and a heated brain, applied to the absurd purpose of hatching unnatural conceits.[1] It

[1] Our deserved idolatry of Shakspeare and Milton was equalled by that paid to this pedantic coxcomb in his own time. He is called, in the title page of his plays (for, besides «Euphues,» he wrote what he styled «Court Comedies»), «the only rare poet of that time; the witty, comical, facetiously quick, and unparalleled John Lillie.» Moreover, his editor, Mr Blount, assures us, «that he sate at Apollo's table; that Apollo gave him a wreath of his own bays without snatching; and that the lyre he played on had no broken strings.» Besides which, we are informed, «Our nation are in his debt for a new English, which he taught them; 'Euphues and his England' began first that language. All our ladies were then his scholars;

appears, that this fantastical person had a considerable share in determining the false taste of his age, which soon became so general, that the tares which sprung from it are to be found even among the choicest of the wheat. Shakspeare himself affords us too many instances of this fashionable heresy in wit; and he, who could create new worlds out of his own imagination, descended to low, and often ill-timed, puns and quibbles. This was not an evil to be cured by the accession of our Scottish James, whose qualifications as a punster were at least equal to his boasted *king-craft.*[1] The false taste, which had been gaining ground even in the reign of Elizabeth, now overflowed the whole kingdom with the impetuosity of a land-flood. These outrages upon language were committed without regard to time and place. They were held good arguments at the bar, though Bacon sat on the woolsack; and eloquence irresistible by the most hardened sinner, when king or Corbet were in the pulpit.[2] Where grave and

and that beauty in court who could not *parler Euphuism*, was as little regarded as she which now there speaks not French.» The satire in Cinthia's Revels is directed by Ben Jonson against this false and pedantic taste.

[1] So that learned and sapient monarch was pleased to call his skill in politics.

[2] Witness a sermon preached at St Mary's before the university of Oxford. It is true the preacher was a layman, and harangued in a gold chain, and girt with a

learned professions set the example, the poets, it will readily be believed, ran headlong into an error, for which they could plead such respectable example. The affectation « of the word» and « of the letter,» for alliteration was almost as fashionable as punning, seemed, in some degree, to bring back English composition to the barbarous rules of the ancient Anglo-Saxons, the merit of whose poems consisted, not in the ideas, but in the quaint arrangement of the words, and the regular recurrence of some favourite sound or letter.

This peculiar taste for twisting and playing upon words, instead of applying them to their natural and proper use, was combined with the similar extravagance of those whom Dr Johnson has entitled metaphysical poets. This class of authors used the same violence towards images and ideas which had formerly been applied to words; in truth, the two styles

sword, as high sheriff of the county; but his eloquence was highly applauded by the learned body whom he addressed, although it would have startled a modern audience, at least as much as the dress of the orator. «Arriving,» said he, «at the Mount of St Mary's, in the stony stage where I now stand, I have brought you some fine biscuits, baked in the oven of charity, carefully conserved for the chickens of the church, the sparrows of the spirit, and the sweet swallows of salvation.»—«Which way of preaching,» says Anthony Wood, the reporter of the homily, «was then mostly in fashion, and commended by the generality of scholars.»—*Athenæ Oxon.*

were often combined, and, even when separate, had a kindred alliance with each other. It is the business of the punster to discover and yoke together two words, which, while they have some resemblance in sound, the more exact the better, convey a totally different signification. The metaphysical poet, on the other hand, piqued himself in discovering hidden resemblances between ideas apparently the most dissimilar, and in combining, by some violent and compelled association, illustrations and allusions utterly foreign from each other. Thus did the metaphysical poet resemble the quibbler, exercising precisely the same tyranny over ideas, which the latter practised upon sounds only.

Jonson gave an early example of metaphysical poetry; indeed, it was the natural resource of a mind amply stored with learning, gifted with a tenacious memory and the power of constant labour, but to which was denied that vivid perception of what is naturally beautiful, and that happiness of expression, which at once conveys to the reader the idea of the poet. These latter qualities unite in many passages of Shakspeare, of which the reader at once acknowledges the beauty, the justice, and the simplicity. But such Jonson was unequal to produce; and he substituted the strange, forced, and most unnatural, though ingenious analogies, which

were afterwards copied by Donne and Cowley.[1] In reading Shakspeare, we often meet passages so congenial to our nature and feelings, that, beautiful as they are, we can hardly help wondering they did not occur to ourselves; in studying Jonson, we have often to marvel how his conceptions could have occurred to any human being. The one is like an ancient statue, the beauty of which, springing from the exactness of proportion, does not always strike at first sight, but rises upon us as we bestow time in considering it; the other is the representation of a monster, which is at first only surprising, and ludicrous or disgusting ever after. When the taste for simplicity, however, is once destroyed, it is long ere a nation recovers it; and the metaphysical poets seem to have retained possession of the public favour from the reign of James I. till the beginning of the civil wars silenced the muses. The universities were perhaps to blame during this period of usurpation; for which it may be admitted in excuse, that the metaphysical poetry could only be practised by men whose minds were deeply stored with learning, and who could boldly

[1] Look at Ben Jonson's «Ode to the Memory of Sir Lucius Carey and Sir H. Morison,» and at most of his Pindarics and Lyrical Pieces. But Ben, when he pleased, could assume the garb of classic simplicity; witness many of his lesser poems.

draw upon a large fund of acquired knowledge for supplying the expenditure of far-fetched and extravagant images, which their compositions required. The book of nature is before all men; but when her limits are to be overstepped, the acquirement of adventitious knowledge becomes of paramount necessity; and it was but natural that Cambridge and Oxford should prize a style of poetry, to which depth of learning was absolutely indispensible.

I have stated, that the metaphysical poetry was fashionable during the early part of Charles the First's reign. It is true, that Milton descended to upbraid that unfortunate prince, that the chosen companion of his private hours was one *William Shakspeare, a player;* but Charles admitted less sacred poets to share his partiality. Ben Jonson supplied his court with masques, and his pageants with verses; and, notwithstanding an ill-natured story, shared no inconsiderable portion of his bounty.[1] Donne, a leader among the metaphysical

[1] In Jonson's last illness, Charles is said to have sent him ten pieces. «He sends me so miserable a donation,» said the expiring satirist, «because I am poor, and live in an alley; go back and tell him, his soul lives in an alley.» Whatever be the truth of this tradition, we know, from an epigram by Jonson, that the king at one time gave him an hundred pounds; no trifling gift for a poor bard, even in the present day.

poets, with whom king James had punned and quibbled in person,[1] shared, in a remarkable degree, the good graces of Charles I., who may therefore be supposed no enemy to his vein of poetry, although neither his sincere piety nor his sacred office restrained him from fantastic indulgence in extravagant conceit, even upon the most solemn themes which can be selected for poetry.[2] Cowley, who, with the learning and acuteness of Donne,

[1] «About a year after his return out of Germany, Dr Carey was made Bishop of Exeter; and by his removal the deanery of St Paul's being vacant, the king sent to Dr Donne, and appointed him to attend him at dinner the next day. When his majesty was sate down, before he had eat any meat, he said, after his pleasant manner, 'Dr Donne, I have invited you to dinner; and though you sit not down with me, yet I will carve to you of a dish that I know you love well; for knowing you love London, I do therefore make you Dean of Paul's; and when I have dined, then do you take your beloved dish home to your study; say grace there to yourself, and much good may it do you.»—Wallon's *Life of Donne*.

[2] See his «Verses to Mr George Herbert, sent him with one of my seals of the anchor and Christ. A sheaf of snakes used heretofore to be my seal, which is the crest of our poor family.» Upon the subject of this change of device he thus quibbles:

> Adopted in God's family, and so
> My old coat lost, into new arms I go;
> The cross my seal, in baptism spread below,
> Does by that form into an anchor grow:
> Crosses grow anchors; bear as thou shouldst do
> Thy cross, and that cross grows an anchor too, etc.

possessed the more poetical qualities of a fertile imagination, and frequent happiness of expression, and who claims the highest place of all who ever plied the unprofitable trade of combining dissimilar and repugnant ideas, was not indeed known to the king during his prosperity; but his talents recommended him at the military court of Oxford, and the most ingenious poet of the metaphysical class enjoyed the applause of Charles before he shared the exile of his consort Henrietta. Cleveland also was honoured with the early notice of Charles;[1] one of the most distinguished metaphysical bards, who afterwards exerted his talents of wit and satire upon the royal side, and strained his imagination for extravagant invective against the Scottish army, who sold their king, and the parliament leaders, who bought him. All these, and others unnecessary to mention, were read and respected at court; being esteemed by their contemporaries, and doubtless believing themselves, the wonder of their own, and the pattern of succeeding ages; and however much they might differ from each other in parts and genius, they sought the same road to poetical fame, by starting the most unnatural images which their imaginations could conceive, or by hunting more common allusions

[1] See his Life, prefixed to his Poems, 12mo. 1677.

through the most minute and circumstantial particulars and ramifications.

Yet though, during the age of Charles I. the metaphysical poets enjoyed the larger proportion of public applause, authors were not wanting who sought other modes of distinguishing themselves. Milton, who must not be named in the same paragraph with others, although he had not yet meditated the sublime work which was to carry his name to immortality, disdained, even in his lesser compositions, the preposterous conceits and learned absurdities, by which his contemporaries acquired distinction. Some of his slighter academic prolusions are, indeed, tinged with the prevailing taste of his age, or, perhaps, were written in ridicule of it; but no circumstance in his life is more remarkable, than that «Comus,» the «Monody on Lycidas,» the «Allegro and Penseroso,» and the «Hymn to the Nativity,» are unpolluted by the metaphysical jargon and affected language which the age esteemed indispensible to poetry. This refusal to bend to an evil so prevailing, and which held out so many temptations to a youth of learning and genius, can only be ascribed to the natural chastity of Milton's taste, improved by an earnest and eager study of the purest models of antiquity.

But besides Milton, who stood aloof and alone, there was a race of lesser poets, who

endeavoured to glean the refuse of the applause reaped by Donne, Cowley, and their followers, by adopting ornaments which the latter had neglected, perhaps, because they could be attained without much labour or abstruse learning. The metaphysical poets, in their slip-shod pindarics, had totally despised, not only smoothness and elegance, but the common rhythm of versification. Many and long passages may be read without perceiving the least difference between them and barbarous, jingling, ill-regulated prose; and in appearance, though the lines be divided into unequal lengths, the eye and ear acknowledge little difference between them and the inscription on a tomb-stone. In a word, not only harmony of numbers, but numbers themselves, were altogether neglected; or, if an author so far respected ancient practice as to make lines which could be scanned like verse, he had done his part, and was perfectly indifferent, although they sounded like prose.[1] But as

[1] It is pleasing to see the natural good taste of honest old Isaac Walton struggling against that of his age. He introduces the beautiful lines,

«Come live with me, and be my love,»

as «that smooth song made by Kit Marlow, now at least fifty years ago.»—«The milk-maid's mother,» he adds, «sung an answer to it, which was made by Sir Walter Raleigh in his younger days. They were old-fashioned poetry, but choicely good. I think much better than *the*

melody will be always acceptable to the ear, some poets chose this neglected road to fame, and gained a portion of public favour, by attending to the laws of harmony, which their rivals had discarded. Waller and Denham were the first who thus distinguished themselves; but, as Johnson happily remarks, what was acquired by Denham was inherited by Waller. Something there was in the situation of both these authors, which led them to depart from what was then the beaten path of composition. They were men of rank, wealth, and fashion, and had experienced all the interruptions to deep study, with which such elevated station is naturally attended. It was in vain for Waller, a wit, a courtier, and a politician; or for Denham, who was only distinguished at the university as a dreaming, dissipated gambler, to attempt to rival the metaphysical subtleties of Donne and Cowley, who had spent serious and sequestered lives in acquiring the knowledge and learning which they squandered in their poetry. Necessity, therefore, and perhaps a dawning of more simple taste, impelled these courtly poets to seek another and more natural mode of pleasing. The melody of verse was a province unoccupied, and Waller, forming his rhythm upon the modula-

strong lines that are in fashion in this critical age.»—*The Complete Angler,* Edit. vi. p. 65.

tion of Fairfax, and other poets of the maiden reign, exhibited in his very first poem[1] striking marks of attention to the suavity of numbers. Denham, in his dedication to Charles II., informs us, that the indulgence of his poetical vein had drawn the notice, although accompanied with the gentle censure, of Charles I., when, in 1647, he obtained access to his person by the intercession of Hugh Peters. Suckling, whom Dryden has termed «a sprightly wit, and a courtly writer,» may be added to the list of smooth and easy poets of the period, and had the same motives as Denham and Waller for attaching himself to that style of composition. He was allowed to have the peculiar art of making whatever he did become him; and it cannot be doubted, that his light and airy style of ballads and sonnets had many admirers. Upon the whole, this class of poets, although they hardly divided the popular favour with the others, were also noticed and applauded. Thus the poets of the earlier part of the seventeenth century may be divided into one class, who sacrificed both sense and sound to the exercise of extravagant, though ingenious, associations of imagery; and a second, who, aiming to distinguish themselves by melody of versification, were

[1] «A Poem on the Danger Charles I., being Prince, escaped in the Road at St Andero.»

satisfied with light and trivial subjects, and, too often contented with attaining smoothness of measure, neglected the more essential qualities of poetry.

The intervention of the civil wars greatly interrupted the study of poetry. The national attention was called to other objects, and those who, in the former peaceful reigns, would have perhaps distinguished themselves as poets and dramatists, were now struggling for fame in the field, or declaiming for power in the senate. The manners of the prevailing party, their fanatical detestation of every thing like elegant or literary amusement, their affected horror at stage representations, which at once silenced the theatres, and their contempt for profane learning, which degraded the universities, all operated, during the civil wars and succeeding usurpation, to check the pursuits of the poet, by withdrawing that public approbation, which is the best, and often the sole, reward of his labour. There was, at this time, a sort of interregnum in the public taste, as well as in its government. The same poets were no doubt alive who had distinguished themselves at the court of Charles: but Cowley and Denham were exiled with their sovereign; Waller was awed into silence by the rigour of the puritanic spirit; and even the muse of Milton was scared from him by the clamour of religious and political controversy, and only

returned, like a sincere friend, to cheer the adversity of one who had neglected her during his career of worldly importance.

During this period, the most unfavourable to literature which had occurred for at least two centuries, Dryden, the subject of this memoir, was gradually and silently imbibing those stores of learning, and cultivating that fancy, which was to do so much to further the reformation of taste and poetry. It is now time to state his descent and parentage.

The name of Dryden is local, and probably originated in the north of England, where, as well as in the neighbouring counties of Scotland, it frequently occurs, though it is not now borne by any person of distinction in these parts. David Driden, or Dryden, married the daughter of William Nicholson of Staff-hill, in the county of Cumberland, and was the great-great-grandfather of our poet. John Dryden, eldest son of David, settled in Northamptonshire, where he acquired the estate of Canons-Ashby, by marriage with Elizabeth, daughter and heiress of Sir John Cope of that county. Wood says, that John Dryden was by profession a schoolmaster, and honoured with the friendship of the great Erasmus, who stood godfather to one of his sons.[1] He

[1] *Fasti Oxon.* vol. I. p. 115. Considering John Dryden's marriage with the heiress of a man of knightly rank, it seems unlikely that he followed the profession of a

appears, from some passages in his will, to have entertained the puritanical principles, which, we shall presently find, descended to his family.[1] Erasmus Driden, his eldest son, succeeded to the estate of Canons-Ashby, was high-sheriff of Northamptonshire in the fortieth year of Queen Elizabeth, and was created a knight baronet in the seventeenth of King James I. Sir Erasmus married Frances, second daughter and co-heiress of William Wilkes of Hodnell, in Warwickshire, by whom he had three sons: first, Sir John Driden, his successor in the title and estate of Canons-Ashby; second, William Driden of Farndon, in Northamptonshire; third, Erasmus Driden of Tichmarsh, in the same county. The last of these was the father of the poet.

Erasmus Driden married Mary, the daughter of the Reverend Henry Pickering, younger son of Sir Gilbert Pickering, a person who, though in considerable favour with James I., was a zealous puritan, and so noted for opposition to the Catholics, that the conspirators in the Gunpowder Treason, his own brother-in-

schoolmaster. But Wood could hardly be mistaken in the second circumstance, some of the family having gloried in it in his hearing.

[1] See *Collins' Baronetage*, vol. II. The testator bequeaths his soul to his Creator, with this singular expression of confidence, « the Holy Ghost assuring my spirit that I am the elect of God.»

law being one of the number,[1] had resolved upon his individual murder, as an episode to the main plot, determining, at the same time, so to conduct it, as to throw the suspicion of the destruction of the Parliament upon the puritans.[2] These principles, we shall soon see,

[1] Robert Keies, executed 31st January, 1606, of whom Fuller, in his Church History, tells the following anecdote: —«A few days before the fatal blow should have been given, Keies, being at Tichmarsh, in Northamptonshire, at his brother-in-law's house, Mr Gilbert Pickering, a Protestant, he suddenly whipped out his sword, and in merriment made many offers therewith at the heads, necks, and sides, of several gentlemen and ladies then in his company. It was then taken for a mere frolic, and so passed accordingly; but afterwards, when the treason was discovered, such as remembered his gestures thought he practised what he intended to do when the plot should take effect; that is, to hack and hew, kill and destroy, all eminent persons of a different religion from himself.» *Caulfield's History of the Gunpowder Plot.*

[2] The following curious story is told to that effect, in Caulfield's History of the Gunpowder Plot, p. 67:—

«There was a Mr Pickering of Tichmarsh-Grove, in Northamptonshire, who was in great esteem with King James. This Mr Pickering had a horse of special note for swiftness, on which he used to hunt with the king. A little before the blow was to be given, Mr Keies, one of the conspirators, and brother-in-law to Mr Pickering, borrowed this horse of him, and conveyed him to London upon a bloody design, which was thus contrived:—Fawkes, upon the day of the fatal blow, was appointed to retire himself into St George's Fields, where this horse was to attend him, to further his escape (as they made him believe), as soon as the Parliament should be blown up. It

became hereditary in the family of Pickering. Mr Malone's industry has collected little concerning our author's maternal grandfather, excepting, that he was born in 1584; named minister of Oldwinkle All-Saints in 1647; and died in 1657. From the time when he attained this

was likewise contrived, that Mr Pickering, who was noted for a puritan, should that morning be murdered in his bed, and secretly conveyed away; and also that Fawkes, as soon as he came into George's Fields, should be there murdered, and so mangled, that he could not be known; upon which, it was to be spread abroad, that the puritans had blown up the Parliament-house; and the better to make the world believe it, there was Mr Pickering, with his choice horse ready to escape, but that stirred up some, who seeing the heinousness of the fact, and him ready to escape, in detestation of so horrible a deed, fell upon him, and hewed him to pieces; and to make it more clear, there was his horse, known to be of special speed and swiftness, ready to carry him away; and upon this rumour, a massacre should have gone through the whole land upon the puritans.

«When the contrivance of this plot was discovered by some of the conspirators, and Fawkes, who was now a prisoner in the Tower, made acquainted with it, whereas before he was made to believe by his companions, that he should be bountifully rewarded for that his good service to the Catholic cause, now perceiving that, on the contrary, his death had been contrived by them, he thereupon freely confessed all that he knew concerning that horrid conspiracy, which before all the torments of the rack could not force him to do.

«The truth of this was attested by Mr William Perkins, who had it from Mr Clement Cotton, to whom Mr Pickering gave the above relation.»

preferment, it is highly probable, that he had been recommended to it by the puritanical tenets which he doubtless held in common with the rest of his family.

Of the poet's father, Erasmus, we know even less than of his other relations. He acted as a justice of peace during the usurpation, and was the father of no less than fourteen children; four sons, and ten daughters. The sons were John, Erasmus, Henry, and James; the daughters, Agnes, Rose, Lucy, Mary, Martha, Elizabeth, Hester, Hannah, Abigail, Frances. Such anecdotes concerning them as my predecessors have recovered may be found in the note. [1]

[1] Erasmus, the poet's immediate younger brother, was in trade, and resided in King-street, Westminster. He succeeded to the family title and estate upon the death of Sir John Dryden, and died at the seat of Canons-Ashby, 3d November, 1718, leaving one daughter and five grandsons. Henry, the poet's third brother, went to Jamaica, and died there, leaving a son, Richard. James, the fourth of the sons, was a tobacconist in London, and died there, leaving two daughters. Of the daughter, Mr Malone, after Oldys, says, that Agnes married Sylvester Emelyn of Stanford, Gent.; that Rose married —— Laughton of Calworth, D.D., in the county of Huntington; that Lucy became the wife of Stephen Umwell of London, merchant; and Martha of —— Bletso of Northampton. Another of the daughters was married to one Shermardine, a bookseller in Little Britain; and Frances, the youngest, to Joseph Sandwell, a tobacconist in Newgate street. This last died,

John Dryden, the subject of this memoir, was born at the parsonage house of Oldwinkle All-Saints, on or about the 9th day of August, 1631. The village then belonged to the family of Exeter, as we are informed by the poet himself, in the postscript to his Virgil. That his family were puritans may readily be admitted; but that they were anabaptists, although confidently asserted by some of our author's political or poetical antagonists, appears altogether improbable. Notwithstanding, therefore, the sarcasm of the Duke of Buckingham, the register of Oldwinkle All-Saints parish, had it been in existence, would probaby have been found to contain the record of our poet's baptism. [1]

Dryden seems to have received the rudi-

10th October 1730, at the advanced age of ninety. She had survived the poet about thirty years. Of the remaining four sisters, no notices occur.

[1] «And though no wit can royal blood infuse,
No more than melt a mother to a muse,
Yet much a certain poet undertook,
That men and manners deals in without book;
And might not more to gospel truth belong,
Than he (*if christened*) does by name of John.»
Poetical Reflections, etc.

Another opponent of our author calls him

«A bristled baptist bred, and then thy strain
Immaculate was free from sinful stain.»
The Laureat, vol. X. p. 105.

ments of his education at Tichmarsh,[1] and was admitted a king's scholar at Westminster, under the tuition of the celebrated Dr Busby, for whom he ever afterwards entertained the most sincere veneration. One of his letters to his old master is addressed, « Honoured Sir,» and couched in terms of respect, and even humility, fully sufficient for the occasion. Another written by Dryden, when his feelings were considerably irritated by a supposed injustice done to his son, is nevertheless qualified by great personal deference to his old preceptor. It may be readily supposed, that such a scholar, under so able a teacher, must have made rapid progress in classical learning. The bent of the juvenile poet, even at this early period, distinguished itself. He translated the third satire of Perseus, as a Thursday night's task, and executed many other exercises of the same nature, in English verse, none of which are now in existence.[2] During the last year of his residence at Westminster, the death of Henry Lord Hastings, a young nobleman of

[1] Upon a monument, erected by Elizabeth Creed to the poet's memory in the church at Tichmarsh, are these words: «We boast that he was bred and had his first learning here.»

[2] «I remember (says Dryden, in a postscript to the arguments of the third satire of Perseus) I translated this satire when I was a King's scholar at Westminster school, for Thursday night's exercise; and believe, that it, and many other of my exercises of this nature in English verse, are still in the hands of my learned master, the Rev. Dr Busby.»

great learning, and much beloved, called forth no less than ninety-eight elegies, one of which was written by our poet, then about eighteen years old. They were published in 1650, under the title of «*Lachrymæ Musarum.*»

Dryden, having obtained a Westminster scholarship, was admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge, on the 11th May, 1650, his tutor being the reverend John Templer, M. A., a man of some learning, who wrote a Latin Treatise in confutation of Hobbes, and a few theological tracts and single sermons. While at college, our author's conduct seems not to have been uniformly regular. He was subject to slight punishment for contumacy to the vice-master,[1] and seems, according to the statement of an obscure libeller, to have been engaged in some public and notorious dispute with a nobleman's son, probably on account

[1] The following order is quoted, by Mr Malone, from the Conclusion-book, in the archives of Trinity College, p. 221.

«July 19, 1652. Agreed, then, That Dryden be put out of Comons, for a fortnight at least; and that he goe not out of the colledg, during the time aforesaid, excepting to sermons, without express leave from the master, or vice-master; and that, at the end of the fortnight, he read a confession of his crime in the hall, at dinner-time, at the three - - - - fellowes table.

«His crime was, his disobedience to the vice-master, and his contumacy in taking his punishment inflicted by him.»

of the indulgence of his turn for satire.[1] He took, however, the degree of Bachelor, in January 1653-4, but neither became Master of Arts,[2] nor a fellow of the university, and certainly never retained for it much of that veneration usually paid by an English scholar to his Alma Mater. He often celebrates Oxford, but only mentions Cambridge as the contrast of the sister university in point of taste and learning:

> «Oxford to him a dearer name shall be
> Than his own mother university:
> Thebes did his green unknowing youth engage,
> He chooses Athens in his riper age.»[3]

A preference so uncommon, in one who had studied at Cambridge, probably originated in those slight disgraces, or perhaps in some other cause of disgust, which we may now search for in vain.

In June 1654, the death of his father, Erasmus Dryden, proved a temporary interruption to our author's studies. He left the university, on this occasion, to take possession of his inhe-

[1] Shadwell, in the Medal of John Bayes,

> «At Cambridge first your scurrilous vein began,
> Where saucily you traduced a nobleman;
> Who for that crime rebuked you on the head,
> And you had been expell'd, had you not fled.»

[2] He received this degree by dispensation from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

[3] Prologue to the University of Oxford.

ritance, consisting of two-thirds of a small estate near Blakesley, in Northamptonshire, worth, in all, about sixty pounds a-year. The other third part of this small property was bequeathed to his mother during her life, and the property reverted to the poet after her death in 1676. With this little patrimony our author returned to Cambridge, where he continued until the middle of the year 1657.

Although Dryden's residence at the university was prolonged to the unusual space of nearly seven years, we do not find, that he distinguished himself, during that time, by any poetical prolusions, excepting a few lines prefixed to a work, entitled, « Sion and Parnassus; or Eprigrams on several Texts of the Old and New Testaments,» published in 1650, by John Hoddesden.[1] Mr Malone conjectures, that our poet would have contributed to the academic collection of verses, entitled, « Oliva Pacis,» and published in 1654, on the peace

[1] Jonathan Dryden, elected a scholar from Westminster into Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1656, of which he became fellow in 1662, was author of some verses in the Cambridge Collections in 1661, on the death of the Duke of Gloucester, and the marriage of the Princess of Orange; and in 1662, on the marriage of Charles II., which have been imputed to our author. An order, quoted by Mr Malone, for abatement of the commencement-money paid at taking the Bachelor's degree, on account of poverty, applies to Jonathan, not to John Dryden.—MALONE, vol. I. p. 17. note.

between England and Holland, had not his father's death interfered at that period. It is probable, we lose but little by the disappearance of any occasional verses which may have been produced by Dryden at this time. The elegy on Lord Hastings, the lines prefixed to «Sion and Parnassus,» and some complimentary stanzas which occur in a letter to his cousin Honor Driden, would have been enough to assure us, even without his own testimony, that Cowley was the darling of his youth; and that he imitated his points of wit, and quirks of epigram, with a similar contempt for the propriety of their application. From these poems we learn enough to be grateful, that Dryden was born at alater period in his century; for had not the road to fame been altered in consequence of the Restoration, his extensive information and acute ingenuity would probably have betrayed the author of the «Ode to St Cecilia,» and the father of English poetical harmony, into rivalling the metaphysical pindarics of Donne and Cowley. The verses, to which we allude, display their subtlety of thought, their puerile extravagance of conceit, and that structure of verse, which, as the poet himself says of Holyday's translations, has nothing of verse in it except the worst part of it—the rhyme, and that far from being unexceptionable. The following lines, in which the poet describes the death of Lord

Hastings by the small-pox, will be probably admitted as a justification of this censure:

«Was there no milder way but the small-pox,
The very filthiness of Pandora's box?
So many spots, like naves on Venus' soil,
One jewel set off with so many a foil;
Blisters with pride swell'd, which through's flesh did sprout,
Like rose-buds, stuck i'the lily-skin about.
Each little pimple had a tear in it,
To wail the fault its rising did commit,
Which, rebel-like, with its own lord at strife,
Thus made an insurrection 'gainst his life.
Or were these gems sent to adorn his skin,
The cabinet of a richer soul within?
No comet need foretel his change drew on,
Whose corpse might seem a constellation.»

This is exactly in the tone of Bishop Corbett's invective against the same disease:

«Oh thou deform'd unwoman-like disease,
Thou plough'st up flesh and blood, and there sow'st pease;
And leav'st such prints on beauty that dost come,
As clouted shoon do on a floor of loam.
Thou that of faces honey-combs dost make,
And of two breasts two cullenders, forsake
Thy deadly trade; now thou art rich, give o'er,
And let our curses call thee forth no more.» [1]

After leaving the university, our author entered the world, supported by friends, from whose character, principles, and situation, it might have been prophesied, with probability,

[1] Elegy on Lady Haddington, in Corbett's Poems, p. 121. Gilchrist's edition.

that his success in life, and his literary reputation, would have been exactly the reverse of what they actually proved. Sir Gilbert Pickering was cousin-german to the poet, and also to his mother; thus standing related to Dryden in a double connexion.[1] This gentleman was a staunch puritan, and having set out as a reformer, ended by being a regicide, and an abettor of the tyranny of Cromwell. He was one of the judges of the unfortunate Charles; and though he did not sit in that bloody court upon the last and fatal day, yet he seems to have concurred in the most violent measures of the unconscientious men who did so. He had been one of the parliamentary counsellors of state, and hesitated not to be numbered among the godly and discreet persons who assisted Cromwell as a privy council. Moreover, he was lord chamberlain of the Protector's court, and received the honour of his mock peerage.

The patronage of such a person was more likely to have elevated Dryden to the temporal greatness and wealth acquired by the sequestrators and committee-men of that oppressive time, than to have aided him in attaining the

[1] Sir John Pickering, father of Sir Gilbert, married Susan, the sister of Erasmus Dryden, the poet's father. But Mary Pickering, the poet's mother, was niece to Sir John Pickering; and thus her son Sir Gilbert was *her* cousin-german also.

summits of Parnassus. For, according to the slight records which Mr Malone has recovered concerning Sir Gilbert Pickering's character, it would seem that, to the hard, precise, fanatical contempt of every illumination, save the inward light, which he derived from his sect, he added the properties of a fiery temper, and a rude and savage address.[1] In what capacity

[1] In one lampoon, he is called «fiery Pickering.» Walker, in his «Sufferings of the Clergy,» prints Jeremiah Steven's account of the Northamptonshire committee of sequestration, in which the character of Pickering, one of the members of that oppressive body, is thus drawn:—«Sir G ——— P——— had an uncle, whose ears were cropt for a libel on Archbishop Whitgift; was first a presbyterian, then an independent, then a Brownist, and afterwards an anabaptist. He was a most furious, fiery, implacable man; was the principal agent in casting out most of the learned clergy; a great oppressor of the country: got a good manor for his booty of the E. of R. and a considerable purse of gold by a plunder at Lynn in Norfolk.» He is thus characterized by an angry limb of the commonwealth, whose republican spirit was incensed by Cromwell creating a peerage:—«Sir Gilbert Pickering, knight of the old stamp, and of considerable revenue in Northamptonshire; one of the Long Parliament, and a great stickler in the change of the government from kingly to that of a commonwealth;—helped to make those laws of treason against kingship; has also changed with all changes that have been since. He was one of the Little Parliament, and helped to break it, as also of all the parliaments since; is one of the Protector's council (his salary 1000*l. per annum*, besides other places), and as if he had been pinned to this sleeve, was never to seek; is become high steward of Westminster; and being so finical, spruce,

Dryden lived with his kinsman, or to what line of life circumstances seemed to destine the future poet, we are left at liberty to conjecture. Shadwell, the virulent antagonist of our author, has called him Sir Gilbert Pickering's clerk; and it is indeed highly probable, that he was employed as his amanuensis, or secretary:

> The next step of advancement you began
> Was being clerk to Noll's lord chamberlain,
> A sequestrator and committee-man.
> *The Medal of John Bayes.*

But I cannot, with Mr Malone, interpret the same passage, by supposing the third line of the triplet to apply to Dryden. Had he been actually a member of a committee of sequestration, that circumstance would never have remained in the dubious obscurity of Shadwell's poetry; it would have been as often echoed and re-echoed, as every other incident of the poet's life, which was capable of bearing

and like an old courtier, is made lord-chamberlain of the Protector's household or court; so that he may well be counted fit and worthy to be taken out of the House to have a negative voice in the other House, though he helped to destroy it in the king and lords. There are more besides him, that make themselves transgressors by building again the things which they once destroyed.» Quoted by Mr Malone from a rare pamphlet in his collection, entitled, «A Second Narrative of the late Parliament, 1658.»

an unfavourable interpretation. I incline therefore to believe, that the terms *sequestrator* and *committee-man* apply not to the poet, but to his patron Sir Gilbert, to whom their propriety cannot be doubted.

Sir Gilbert Pickering was not our author's only relation at the court of Cromwell. The chief of his family, Sir John Driden, elder brother of the poet's father, was also a flaming and bigotted puritan,[1] through whose gifts and merits his nephew might reasonably hope to attain preferment. In a youth entering life under the protection of such relations, who could have anticipated the future dramatist and poet laureat, much less the advocate and martyr of prerogative and of the Stuart family, the convert and confessor of the Roman Catholic faith? In his after career, his early connexions with the puritans, and the principles of his kins-

[1] Like Sir Gilbert Pickering, he was a member of the Northamptonshire committee of Sequestration, and his deeds are thus commemorated in Walker's «Sufferings of the Clergy:»—«Sir J——— D———n was never noted for ability or discretion; was a puritan by tenure, his house (Canons Ashby) being an ancient college, where he possessed the church, and abused most part of it to profane uses: the chancel he turned to a barn; the body of it to a corn-chamber and store-house, reserving one side aisle of it for the public service of prayers, etc. He was noted for weakness and simplicity, and never put on any business of moment, but was very furious against the clergy.»

men during the Civil Wars and usurpation, were often made subjects of reproach, to which he never seems to have deigned an answer.[1]

The death of Cromwell was the first theme of our poet's muse. Averse as the puritans were to any poetry, save that of Hopkins, of Withers, or of Wisdom, they may be reasonably supposed to have had some sympathy with Dryden's sorrow upon the death of Oliver, even although it vented itself in the profane and unprofitable shape of an elegy. But we

[1] In a satire called «The Protestant Poets,» our author is thus contrasted with Sir Roger L'Estrange. In levelling his reproaches, the satirist was not probably very solicitous about genealogical accuracy; as, in the eighth line, I conceive Sir John Dryden to be alluded to, although he is termed our poet's grandfather, when he was in fact his uncle. Sir Erasmus Dryden was indeed a fanatic, and so was Henry Pickering, Dryden's paternal and maternal grandfather; but neither were men of mark or eminence:

«But though he spares no waste of words or conscience,
He wants the Tory turn of thorough nonsense,
That thoughtless air, that makes light Hodge so jolly;—
Void of all weight, *he* wantons in his folly.
Not so forced Bayes, whom sharp remorse attends,
While his heart loaths the cause his tongue defends;
Hourly he acts, hourly repents the sin,
And is all over *grandfather* within:
By day that ill-laid spirit checks—o' nights
Old Pickering's ghost, a dreadful spectre, frights.
Returns of spleen his slacken'd speed remit,
And cramp his loose careers with intervals of wit:
While, without stop at sense, or ebb of spite,
Breaking all bars, bounding o'er wrong and right,
Contented Roger gallops out of sight.»

have no means of estimating its reception with the public, if, in truth, the public long interested themselves about the memory of Cromwell, while his relations and dependants presented to them the more animated and interesting spectacle of a struggle for his usurped power. Richard perhaps, and the immediate friends of the deceased Protector, with such of Dryden's relations as were attached to his memory, may have thought, like the Tinker in the Taming of the Shrew, that this same elegy was « marvellous good matter, » but it did not probably attract much general attention. The first edition, in 1659, is extremely rare : it was reprinted, however, along with those of Sprat and Waller, in the course of the same year. After the Restoration this piece fell into a state of oblivion, from which it may be believed that the author, who had seen a new light in politics, was by no means solicitous to recal it. His political antagonist did not, however, fail to awaken its memory, when Dryden became a decided advocate for the royal prerogative, and the hereditary right of the Stuarts. During the controversies of Charles the Second's reign, in which Dryden took so decided a share, his eulogy on Cromwell was often objected to him, as a proof of inconsistence and apostacy. One passage, which plainly applies to the civil wars in general, was wrested to signify an explicit approbation of the murder of Charles

the First; and the whole piece was reprinted by an incensed antagonist, under the title of « An Elegy on the Usurper O. C., by the author of Absalom and Achitophel, published (it is ironically added) to show the loyalty and integrity of the poet,»—an odd piece of vengeance, which has perhaps never been paralleled, except in the single case of « Love in a Hollow Tree.» [1] The motives of the Duchess of Marlborough, in reprinting Lord Grimestone's memorable dramatic essay, did not here apply. The elegy on Cromwell, although doubtless sufficiently faulty, contained symptoms of a regenerating taste; and, politically considered, although a panegyric on an usurper, the topics of praise are selected with attention to truth, and are, generally speaking, such as Cromwell's worst enemies could not have denied to him. Neither had Dryden made the errors or misfortunes of the royal family, and their followers, the subject of censure or of contrast. With respect to them, it was hardly possible that a eulogy on such a theme could have less offence in it. This was perhaps a fortunate circumstance for Dryden at the Restoration; and it

[1] This piece was called in, and destroyed by the noble author; but Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, when opposing Lord Grimestone at an election, maliciously printed and dispersed a large impression of his smothered performance, with a frontispiece representing an elephant dancing on the slack rope.

must be noticed to his honour, that as he spared the exiled monarch in his panegyric on the usurper, so, after the Restoration, in his numerous writings on the side of royalty, there is no instance of his recalling his former praise of Cromwell.

After the frequent and rapid changes which the government of England underwent from the death of Cromwell, in the spring of 1660, Charles II. was restored to the throne of his ancestors. It may be easily imagined, that this event, a subject in itself highly fit for poetry, and which promised the revival of poetical pursuits, was hailed with universal acclamation by all whose turn for verse had been suppressed and stifled during the long reign of fanaticism, The Restoration led the way to the revival of letters, as well as that of legal government. With Charles, as Dryden has expressed it,

> The officious muses came along,
> A gay, harmonious quire, like angels ever young.

It was not, however, to be expected, that an alteration of the taste which had prevailed in the days of Charles I., was to be the immediate consequence of the new order of things. The muse awoke, like the sleeping beauty of the fairy tale, in the same antiquated and absurd vestments in which she had fallen asleep twenty years before; or if the reader will par-

don another simile, the poets were like those who, after a long mourning, resume for a time their ordinary dresses, of which the fashion has in the mean time passed away. Other causes contributed to a temporary revival of the metaphysical poetry. Almost all its professors, attached to the house of Stuart, had been martyrs, or confessors at least, in its cause. Cowley, their leader, was yet alive, and returned to claim the late reward of his loyalty and his sufferings. Cleveland had died a victim to the contempt, rather than the persecution, of the republicans;[1] but this most ardent of cavalier poets was succeeded by

[1] He was one of the garrison of Newark, which held out so long for Charles I., and has left a curious specimen of the wit of the time, in his controversy with a parliamentary officer, whose servant had robbed him, and taken refuge in Newark. The following is the beginning of his answer to a demand that the fugitive should be surrendered:

«Sixthly, Beloved,

«Is it so then, that our brother and fellow-labourer in the Gospel is start aside? then this may serve for an use of instruction, not to trust in man, nor in the son of man. Did not Demas leave Paul? did not Onesimus run from his master Philemon? besides, this should teach us to employ our talent, and not to lay it up in a napkin. Had it been done among the cavaliers, it had been just; then the Israelite had spoiled the Egyptian; but for Simeon to plunder Levi, that! that! You see, sir, what use I make of the doctrine you sent me; and indeed since you change style so far as to nibble at wit, you must pardon me, if, to quit scores, I pretend a little to the gift of preaching,»

Wild, whose «*Iter Boreale*,» a poem on Monk's march from Scotland, formed upon Cleveland's model, obtained extensive popularity among the citizens of London.[1] Dryden's good sense and natural taste perceived the obvious defects of these, the very coarsest of metaphysical poets; insomuch, that, in his «Essay on Dramatic Poetry,» he calls wresting and torturing one word into another,

etc. Such was the wit of Cleveland. After the complete subjugation of the royalists, he was apprehended, having in his possession a bundle of poems and satirical songs against the republicans. He appeared before the commonwealth general with the dignified air of one who is prepared to suffer for his principles. He was disappointed; for the military judge, after a contemptuous glance at the papers, exclaimed to Cleveland's accusers, «Is this all ye have against him? Go, let the poor knave sell his ballads!» Such an acquittal was more severe than any punishment. The conscious virtue of the loyalist would have borne the latter; but the pride of the poet could not sustain his contemptuous dismissal; and Cleveland is said to have broken his heart in consequence. *Biographia Britannica*, voce *Cleveland*.

[1] «He is the very Withers of the city,» says Dryden, of Wild; «they have bought more editions of his works than would serve to lay under all their pies at the lord mayor's Christmas. When his famous poem first came out in the year 1660, I have seen them reading it in the midst of Change time; nay, so vehement they were at it, that they lost their bargain by the candles' ends: but what will you say, if he has been received amongst great persons? I can assure you he is this day the envy of one who is lord in the art of quibbling, and who does not take it well, that any man should intrude so far into his province.»

a catachresis, or Clevelandism, and charges Wild with being in poetry what the French call *un mauvais buffon.*

Sprat, and an host of inferior imitators, marched for a time in the footsteps of Cowley; delighted, probably, to discover in Pindaric writing, as it was called, a species of poetry which required neither sound nor sense, provided only there was a sufficient stock of florid and extravagant thoughts, expressed in harsh and bombastic language.

But this style of poetry, although it was for a time revived, and indeed continued to be occasionally employed even to the end of the eighteenth century, had too slight foundation in truth and nature to maintain the exclusive pre-eminence, which it had been exalted to during the reigns of the two first monarchs of the Stuart race. As Rochester profanely expressed it, Cowley's poetry was not of God, and therefore could not stand. An approaching change of public taste was hastened by the manners of the restored monarch and his courtiers. That pedantry which had dictated the excessive admiration of metaphysical conceits, was not the characteristic of the court of Charles II., as it had been of those of his grandfather and father. Lively and witty by nature, with all the acquired habits of an adventurer, whose wanderings, military and political, left him time neither for profound reflec-

tion, nor for deep study, the restored monarch's literary taste, which was by no means contemptible, was directed towards a lighter and more pleasing style of poetry than the harsh and scholastic productions of Donne and Cowley. The admirers, therefore, of this old school were confined to the ancient cavaliers, and the old courtiers of Charles I.; persons unlikely to lead the fashion in the court of a gay monarch, filled with such men as Buckingham, Rochester, Etherege, Sedley, and Mulgrave, whose time and habits confined their own essays to occasional verses and satirical effusions, in which they often ridiculed the heights of poetry they were incapable of attaining. With such men the class of poets, which before the Civil War held but a secondary rank, began to rise in estimation. Waller, Suckling, and Denham, began to assert a pre-eminence over Cowley and Donne; the ladies, whose influence in the court of James and Charles I. was hardly felt, and who were then obliged to be contented with such pedantic worship as is contained in the «Mistress» of Cowley, and the «Epithalamion» of Donne, began now, when their voices were listened to, and their taste consulted, to determine that their poetical lovers should address them in strains more musical, if not more intelligible. What is most acceptable to the fair sex will

always sway the mode of a gay court; and the character of a smooth and easy sonnetteer was soon considered as an indispensible requisite to a man of wit and fashion, terms which were then usually synonymous.

To those who still retained a partiality for that exercise of the fancy and memory, afforded by the metaphysical poetry, the style of satire then prevalent afforded opportunities of applying it. The same depth of learning, the same extravagant ingenuity in combining the most remote images, and in driving casual associations to the verge of absurdity, almost all the remarkable features which characterized the poetry of Cowley, may be successfully traced in the satire of Hudibras. The sublime itself borders closely on the ludicrous; but the bombast and extravagant cannot be divided from it. The turn of thought, and the peculiar kind of mental exertion, corresponds in both styles of writing; and although Butler pursued the ludicrous, and Cowley aimed at the surprising, the leading features of their poetry only differ like those of the same face convulsed with laughter, or arrested in astonishment. The district of metaphysical poetry was thus invaded by the satirists, who sought weapons there to avenge the misfortunes and oppression which they had so lately sustained from the puritans; and as it is dif-

ficult in a laughing age to render serious what has been once applied to ludicrous purposes, Butler and his imitators retained quiet possession of the style which they had usurped from the grave bards of the earlier age.

A single poet, Sir William D'Avenant, made a meritorious, though a misguided and unsuccessful effort, to rescue poetry from becoming the mere handmaid of pleasure, or the partizan of political or personal disputes, and to restore her to her natural rank in society, as an auxiliary of religion, policy, law, and virtue. His heroic poem of «Gondibert» has, no doubt, great imperfections; but it intimates every where a mind above those laborious triflers, who called that poetry which was only verse; and very often exhibits a majestic, dignified, and manly simplicity, equally superior to the metaphysical school, by the doctrines of which D'Avenant was occasionally misled. Yet, if that author too frequently imitated their quaint affectation of uncommon sentiment and associations, he had at least the merit of couching them in stately and harmonious verse; a quality of poetry totally neglected by the followers of Cowley. I mention D'Avenant here, and separate from the other poets, who were distinguished about the time of the Restoration, because I think that Dryden, to whom we are about to return, was, at that period, an admirer

and imitator of « Gondibert, » as we are certain that he was a personal and intimate friend of the author.

With the return of the king, the fall of Dryden's political patrons was necessarily involved. Sir Gilbert Pickering, having been one of Charles's judges, was too happy to escape into obscurity, under an absolute disqualification for holding any office, political, civil, or ecclesiastical. The influence of Sir John Dryden was ended at the same time; and thus both these relations, under whose protection Dryden entered life, and by whose influence he was probably to have been aided in some path to wealth or eminence, became at once incapable of assisting him; and even connexion with them was rendered, by the change of times, disgraceful, if not dangerous. Yet it may be doubted whether Dryden felt this evil in its full extent. Sterne has said of a character, that a blessing which closed his mouth, or a misfortune which opened it with a good grace, were nearly equal to him; nay, that sometimes the misfortune was the more acceptable of the two. It is possible, by a parity of reasoning, that Dryden may have felt himself rather relieved from, than deprived of, his fanatical patrons, under whose guidance he could never hope to have indulged in that career of literary pursuit, which the new order

of things presented to the ambition of the youthful poet; at least, he lost no time in useless lamentation, but, now in his thirtieth year, proceeded to exert that poetical talent, which had heretofore been repressed by his own situation, and that of the country.

Dryden, left to his own exertions, hastened to testify his joyful acquiescence in the restoration of monarchy, by publishing «*Astræa Redux*,» a poem which was probably distinguished among the innumerable congratulations poured forth upon the occasion; and he added to those which hailed the coronation, in 1661, the verses entitled, «A Panegyric to his Sacred Majesty.» These pieces testify, that the author had already made some progress in harmonizing his versification. But they also contain many of those points of wit, and turns of epigram, which he condemned in his more advanced judgment. The same description applies, in a yet stronger degree, to the verses addressed to Lord Chancellor Hyde (Lord Clarendon), on the new-year's-day of 1662., in which Dryden has more closely imitated the metaphysical poetry than in any poem, except the juvenile elegy on Lord Hastings. I cannot but think, that the poet consulted the taste of his patron, rather than his own, in adopting this peculiar style. Clarendon was educated in the court of Charles I., and Dryden may have

thought it necessary, in addressing him, to imitate the « strong verses, » which were then admired.

According to the fashion of the times, such copies of occasional verses were rewarded by a gratuity from the person to whom they were addressed; and poets had not yet learned to think this mode of receiving assistance incompatible with the feelings of dignity or delicacy. Indeed, in the common transactions of that age, one sees something resembling the eastern custom of accompanying with a present, and not always a splendid one, the usual forms of intercourse and civility. Thus we find the wealthy corporation of Hull, backing a polite address to the Duke of Monmouth, their governor, with a present of *six broad pieces;* and his grace deemed it a point of civility to press the acceptance of the same gratuity upon the member of parliament for the city, by whom it was delivered to him.[1] We may therefore believe, that Dry-

[1] «The Duke of Monmouth returned on Saturday from New-Market. To-day I waited on him, and first presented him with your letter, which he read all over very attentively; and then prayed me to assure you, that he would, upon all occasions, be most ready to give you the marks of his affection, and assist you in any affairs you should recommend to him. I then delivered to him the six broad pieces, telling him, that I was deputed to blush on your behalf for the meanness of the present, etc.; but he took me off, and said he thanked you for it, and accepted it as a token of your kindness. He had, before I came in, as I was told, considered what to do with the gold; and but

den received some compliment from the king and chancellor; and I am afraid the same premises authorize us to conclude that it was but trifling. Meantime, our author having no settled means of support, except his small landed property, and having now no assistance to expect from his more wealthy kinsmen, to whom, probably, neither his literary pursuits, nor his commencing them by a panegyric on the Restoration, were very agreeable, and whom he had also offended by a slight change in spelling his name,[1] seems to have been reduced to narrow and uncomfortable circumstances. Without believing, in its full extent, the exaggerated account given by Brown and Shadwell,[2] we may discover from their reproaches,

that I by all means prevented the offer, or I had been in danger of being reimbursed with it.»—Andrew Marvell's *Works*, vol. I. p. 210. *Letter to the Mayor of Hull.*

[1] From Driden to Dryden.

[2] Shadwell makes Dryden say, that after some years spent at the university, he came to London. «At first I struggled with a great deal of persecution, took up with a lodging which had a window no bigger than a pocket looking-glass, dined at a three-penny ordinary enough to starve a vacation tailor, kept little company, went clad in homely drugget, and drunk wine as seldom as a rechabite, or the grand seignior's confessor.» The old gentleman, who corresponded with the «Gentleman's Magazine,» and remembered Dryden before the rise of his fortunes, mentions his suit of plain drugget, being, by the by, the same garb in which he himself has clothed Flecnoe, who «coarsely clad in Norwich drugget came.»

that, at the commencement of his literary career, Dryden was connected, and probably lodged, with Herringman the bookseller, in the New Exchange, for whom he wrote prefaces, and other occasional pieces. But having, as Mr Malone has observed, a patrimony, though a small one, of his own, it seems impossible that our author was ever in that state of mean and abject dependance, which the malice of his enemies afterwards pretended. The same malice misrepresented, or greatly exaggerated, the nature of Dryden's obligations to Sir Robert Howard, with whom he became acquainted probably about the time of the Restoration, whose influence was exerted in his favour, and whose good offices the poet returned by literary assistance.

Sir Robert Howard was a younger son of Thomas Earl of Berkeley, and, like all his family, had distinguished himself as a royalist, particularly at the battle of Cropley Bridge. He had recently suffered a long imprisonment in Windsor Castle during the usurpation. His rank and merits made him, after the Restoration, a patron of some consequence; and upon his publishing a collection of verses very soon after that period, Dryden prefixed an address « to his honoured friend, » on « his excellent poems. » Sir Robert Howard understood the value of Dryden's attachment, introduced him into his family, and probably aided in procuring

his productions that degree of attention from the higher world, for want of which the most valuable efforts of genius have often sunk into unmerited obscurity. Such, in short, were his exertions in favour of Dryden, that, though we cannot believe he was indebted to Howard for those necessaries of life which he had the means to procure for himself, the poet found ground to acknowledge, that his patron had not only been « careful of his fortune, which was the effect of his nobleness, but solicitous of his reputation, which was that of his kindness. »

Thus patronized, our author seems to have advanced in reputation, as he became more generally known to the learned and ingenious of his time. Yet we have but few traces of the labour, by which he doubtless attained, and secured, his place in society. A short satire on the Dutch, written to animate the people of England against them, appeared in 1662. It is somewhat in the hard style of invective, which Cleveland applied to the Scottish nation; yet Dryden thought it worth while to weave the same verses into the prologue and epilogue of the tragedy of « Amboyna, » a piece written in 1673, with the same kind intentions towards the States-General.

Science, as well as poetry, began to revive after the iron dominion of military fanaticism was ended; and Dryden, who through life was attached to experimental philosophy, speedily

associated himself with those who took interest in its progress. He was chosen a member of the newly-instituted Royal Society, 26th November, 1662; an honour which cemented his connexion with the most learned men of the time, and is an evidence of the respect in which he was already held. Most of these, and the discoveries by which they had distinguished themselves, Dryden took occasion to celebrate in his « Epistle to Dr Walter Charleton, » a learned physician, upon his treatise of Stonhenge. Gilbert, Boyle, Harvey, and Ent, are mentioned with enthusiastic applause, as treading in the path pointed out by Bacon, who first broke the fetters of Aristotle, and taught the world to derive knowledge from experiment. In these elegant verses, the author divests himself of all the flippant extravagance of point and quibble, in which, complying with his age, he had hitherto indulged, though of late in a limited degree.

While thus united in friendly communion with men of kindred and congenial spirits, Dryden seems to have been sensible of the necessity of applying his literary talents to some line, in which he might derive a steadier and more certain recompense, than by writing occasional verses to the great, or doing literary drudgery for the bookseller. His own genius would probably have directed him to the ambitious labours of an epic poem; but for this

the age afforded little encouragement. « Gondibert, » the style of which Dryden certainly both admired and copied, became a martyr to the raillery of the critics; and, to fill up the measure of shame, the « Paradise Lost » fell still-born from the press. This last instance of bad taste had not, it is true, yet taken place; but the men who were guilty of it were then living under Dryden's observation, and their manners and habits could not fail to teach him to anticipate the little encouragement they were likely to afford to the loftier labours of poetry. One only line remained, in which poetical talents might exert themselves, with some chance of procuring their possessor's reward, or at least maintenance, and this was dramatic composition. To this Dryden sedulously applied himself, with various success, for many years. But before proceeding to trace the history of his dramatic career, I proceed to notice such pieces of his poetry, as exhibit marks of his earlier style of composition.

The victory gained by the Duke of York over the Dutch fleet on the 3d of June, 1665, and his Duchess's subsequent journey into the north, furnished Dryden with the subject of a few occasional verses; in which the style of Waller (who came forth with a poem on the same subject) is successfully imitated. In addressing her grace, the poet suppresses all the horrors of the battle, and turns her eyes upon

the splendour of a victory, for which the kingdom was indebted to her husband's valour, and her « chaste vows. » In these verses, not the least vestige of metaphysical wit can be traced; and they were accordingly censured, as wanting height of fancy, and dignity of words. This criticism Dryden refuted, by alleging, that he had succeeded in what he did attempt, in the softness of expression and smoothness of the measure (the appropriate ornaments of an address to a lady), and that he was accused of that only thing which he could well defend. It seems, however, very possible, that these remarks impelled him to undertake a task, in which vigour of fancy and expression might, with propriety, be exercised. Accordingly, his next poem was of greater length and importance. This is a historical account of the events of the year 1666, under the title of « *Annus Mirabilis*, » to which distinction the incidents which had occurred in that space gave it some title. The poem being in the elegiac stanza, Dryden relapsed into an imitation of « Gondibert, » from which he had departed ever since the « Elegy on Cromwell. » From this it appears, that the author's admiration of D'Avenant had not decreased. Indeed, he, long afterwards, bore testimony to that author's quick and piercing imagination; which at once produced thoughts remote, new, and surprising, such as could not easily enter into

any other fancy. Dryden at least equalled D'Avenant in this quality; and certainly excelled him in the powers of composition, which are to embody the conceptions of the imagination; and in the extent of acquired knowledge, by which they were to be enforced and illustrated. In his preface, he has vindicated the choice of his stanza, by a reference to the opinion of D'Avenant,[1] which he sanctions by affirming, that he had always, himself, thought quatrains, or stanzas of verse in alternate rhyme, more noble, and of greater dignity, both for sound and number, than any other verse in use among us. By this attention to sound and rhythm, he improved upon the school of metaphysical poets, which disclaimed attention to either; but in the thought and expression itself, the style of D'Avenant more nearly resembled Cowley's than that of Denham and Waller. The same ardour for what Dryden calls « wit-writing, » the same unceasing exercise of the memory, in search of wonderful thoughts and allusions, and the same contempt

[1] D'Avenant alleges the advantages of a respite and pause between every stanza, which should be so constructed as to comprehend a period; and adds, «nor doth alternate rhyme, by any lowliness of cadence, make the sound less heroic, but rather adapt it to a plain and stately composing of music; and the brevity of the stanza renders it less subtle to the composer, and more easy to the singer, which, in *stilo recitativo,* when the story is long, is chiefly requisite.» *Preface to Gondibert.*

for the subject, except as the medium of displaying the author's learning and ingenuity, marks the style of D'Avenant, though in a less degree than that of the metaphysical poets, and though chequered with many examples of a simpler and chaster character. Some part of this deviation was, perhaps, owing to the nature of the stanza; for the structure of the quatrain prohibited the bard, who used it, from rambling into those digressive similes, which, in the Pindaric strophe, might be pursued through endless ramifications. If the former started an extravagant thought, or a quaint image, he was compelled to bring it to a point within his four-lined stanza. The snake was thus scotched, though not killed; and conciseness being rendered indispensible, a great step was gained towards concentration of thought, which is necessary to the simple and to the sublime. The manner of D'Avenant, therefore, though short-lived, and ungraced by public applause, was an advance towards true taste, from the unnatural and frantic indulgence of unrestrained fancy; and, did it claim no other merit, it possesses that of having been twice sanctioned by the practice of Dryden, upon occasions of uncommon solemnity.

The «*Annus Mirabilis*» evinces a considerable portion of labour and attention; the lines and versification are highly polished, and

the expression was probably carefully corrected. Dryden, as Johnson remarks, already exercised the superiority of his genius, by recommending his own performance, as written upon the plan of Virgil; and as no unsuccessful effort at producing those well-wrought images and descriptions, which create admiration, the proper object of heroic poetry. The «*Annus Mirabilis*» may indeed be regarded as one of Dryden's most elaborate pieces; although it is not written in his later, better, and most peculiar style of poetry.

The poem first appeared in octavo, in 1667, and was afterwards frequently reprinted in quarto. It was dedicated to the Metropolis of Great Britain, as represented by the lord mayor and magistrates. A letter to Sir Robert Howard was prefixed to the poem, in which the author explains the purpose of the work, and the difficulties which presented themselves in the execution. And in this epistle, as a contrast between the smooth and easy style of writing which was proper in addressing a lady, and the exalted style of heroic, or at least historical poetry, he introduces the verses to the Duchess of York, already mentioned.

The «*Annus Mirabilis*» being the last poetical work of any importance produced by our author, until «Absalom and Achitophel,» the reader may here pause, and consider, in the

progressive improvement of Dryden, the gradual renovation of public taste. The irregular Pindaric ode was now abandoned to Arwaker, Behn, Durfey, and a few inferior authors; who, either from its tempting facility of execution, or from an affected admiration of old times and fashions, still pestered the public with imitations of Cowley. The rough measure of Donne (if it had any pretension to be called a measure) was no longer tolerated, and it was expected, even of those who wrote satires, lampoons, and occasional verses, that their rhymes should be rhymes, both to the ear and eye; and that they should neither adore their mistresses, nor abuse their neighbours, in lines which differed only from prose in the fashion of printing. Thus the measure used by Rochester, Buckingham, Sheffield, Sedley, and other satirists, if not polished or harmonized, approaches more nearly to modern verse, than that of Hall or Donne. In the « Elegy on Cromwell,» and the « *Annus Mirabilis*,» Dryden followed D'Avenant, who abridged, if he did not explode, the quaintnesses of his predecessors. In « *Astræa Redux*,» and his occasional verses, to Dr Charleton, the Duchess of York, and others, the poet proposed a separate and simpler model, more dignified than that of Suckling or Waller; more harmonious in measure, and chaste in expression, than those of Cowley and Crashaw. Much there

doubtless remained of ancient subtlety, and ingenious quibbling; but when Dryden declares, that he proposes Virgil, in preference to Ovid, to be his model in the « *Annus Mirabilis,* » it sufficiently implies, that the main defect of the poetry of the last age had been discovered, and was in the way of being amended by gradual, and almost imperceptible, degrees.

In establishing or refining the latter style of writing, in couplet verse, our author found great assistance from his dramatic practice; to trace the commencement of which is the purpose of the next section.

SECTION II.

Revival of the Drama at the Restoration—Heroic Plays—Comedies of Intrigue—Commencement of Dryden's Dramatic Career—The Wild Gallant—Rival Ladies—Indian Queen and Emperor—Dryden's Marriage—Essay on Dramatic Poetry, and subsequent Controversy with Sir Robert Howard—The Maiden Queen—The Tempest—Sir Martin Mar-all—The Mock Astrologer—The Royal Martyr—The Two Parts of the Conquest of Granada—Dryden's Situation at this Period.

It would appear, that Dryden, at the period of the Restoration, renounced all views of making his way in life except by exertion of the literary talents with which he was so eminently endowed. His becoming a writer of plays was a necessary consequence; for the theatres, newly opened after so long silence, were resorted to with all the ardour inspired by novelty; and dramatic composition was the only line which promised something like an adequate reward to the professors of literature. In our sketch of the taste of the seventeenth century previous to the Restoration, this topic was intentionally postponed.

In the times of James I. and of his successor, the theatre retained, in some degree, the splendour with which the excellent writers of the virgin reign had adorned it. It is true, that authors of the latter period fell far below those gigantic poets, who flourished in the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries; but what the stage had lost in dramatic composition was, in some degree, supplied by the increasing splendour of decoration, and the favour of the court. A private theatre, called the Cockpit, was maintained at Whitehall, in which plays were performed before the court; and the king's company of actors often received command to attend the royal progresses.[1] Masques, a species of representation calculated exclusively for the recreation of the great, in whose halls they were exhibited, were an usual entertainment of Charles and his consort. The machinery and decorations were often superintended by Inigo Jones, and the poetry composed by Ben Jonson the laureat. Even Milton deigned to contribute one of his most fascinating poems to the service of the drama; and, notwithstanding the severity of his puritanic tenets, «Comus» could only have been composed by one who felt the full enchantment of the theatre. But all this splendour vanished at the approach

[1] Malone's «History of the Stage.»

of civil war. The stage and court were almost as closely united in their fate as royalty and episcopacy, had the same enemies, the same defenders, and shared the same overwhelming ruin. «No throne no theatre,» seemed as just a dogma as the famous « No king no bishop.» The puritans indeed commenced their attack against royalty in this very quarter; and, while they impugned the political exertions of prerogative, they assailed the private character of the monarch and his consort, for the encouragement given to the profane stage, that rock of offence, and stumbling-block to the godly. Accordingly, the superiority of the republicans was no sooner decisive, than the theatres were closed, and the dramatic poets silenced. No department of poetry was accounted lawful; but the drama being altogether unhallowed and abominable, its professors were persecuted, while others escaped with censure from the pulpit, and contempt from the rulers. The miserable shifts to which the surviving actors were reduced during the commonwealth have been often detailed. At times they were connived at by the caprice or indolence of their persecutors; but, in general, as soon as they had acquired any slender stock of properties, they were beaten, imprisoned, and stripped, at the pleasure of the soldiery.

The Restoration naturally brought with it a revived taste for those elegant amusements,

which, during the usurpation, had been condemned as heathenish, or punished as appertaining especially to the favourers of royalty. To frequent them, therefore, became a badge of loyalty, and a virtual disavowal of those puritanic tenets, which all now agreed in condemning. The taste of the restored monarch also was decidedly in favour of the drama. At the foreign courts, which it had been his lot to visit, the theatre was the chief entertainment; and as amusement was always his principal pursuit, it cannot be doubted that he often sought it there. The interest, therefore, which the monarch took in the restoration of the stage, was direct and personal. Had it not been for this circumstance, it seems probable that the general audience, for a time at least, would have demanded a revival of those pieces which had been most successful before the civil wars; and that Shakspeare, Massinger, and Fletcher, would have resumed their acknowledged superiority upon the English stage. But as the theatres were re-established and cherished by the immediate influence of the sovereign, and of the court which returned with him from exile, a taste formed during their residence abroad dictated the nature of entertainments which were to be presented to them. It is worthy of remark, that Charles took the models of the two grand departments of the drama from two different countries.

France afforded the pattern of those tragedies which continued in fashion for twenty years after the Restoration, and which were called Rhyming or Heroic Plays. In that country, however, contrary to the general manners of the people, a sort of stately and precise ceremonial early took possession of the theatre. The French dramatist was under the necessity of considering less the situation of the persons of the drama than that of the performers, who were to represent it before a monarch and his court. It was not, therefore, sufficient for the author to consider how human beings would naturally express themselves in the predicament of the scene; he had the more embarrassing task of so modifying their expressions of passion and feeling, that they might not exceed the decorum necessary in the august presence of the *Grand Monarque*. A more effectual mode of freezing the dialogue of the drama could hardly have been devised, than by introducing into the theatre the etiquette of the drawing-room. That etiquette also, during the reign of Louis XIV., was of a kind peculiarly forced and unnatural. The romances of Calprenede and Scuderi, those ponderous and unmerciful folios now consigned to utter oblivion, were in that reign not only universally read and admired, but supposed to furnish the most perfect models of gallantry and heroism; although, in the words of an elegant female au-

thor, these celebrated writings are justly described as containing only « unnatural representations of the passions, false sentiments, false precepts, false wit, false honour, and false modesty, with a strange heap of improbable, unnatural incidents, mixed up with true history, and fastened upon some of the great names of antiquity. »[1] Yet upon the model of such works was framed the court manners of the reign of Louis, and, in imitation of them, the French tragedy, in which every king was by prescriptive right a hero, every female a goddess, every tyrant a fire-breathing chimera, and every soldier an irresistible Amadis; in which, when perfected, we find lofty sentiments, splendid imagery, eloquent expression, sound morality, every thing but the language of human passion and human character. In the hands of Corneille, and still more in those of Racine, much of the absurdity of the original model was cleared away, and much that was valuable substituted in its stead; but the plan being fundamentally wrong, the high talents of those authors unfortunately only tended to reconcile their countrymen to a style of

[1] *Haud inexperta loquitur.* «I have,» she continues, «(and yet I am still alive,) drudged through Le Grand Cyrus, in twelve huge volumes; Cleopatra, in eight or ten; Polexander, Ibrahim, Clelie, and some others, whose names, as well as all the rest of them, I have forgotten.» *Letter of Mrs Chapone to Mrs Carter.*

writing, which must otherwise have fallen into contempt. Such as it was, it rose into high favour at the court of Louis XIV., and was by Charles introduced upon the English stage. «The favour which heroic plays have lately found upon our theatres,» says our author himself, «have been wholly derived to them from the countenance and approbation they have received at court.»[1]

The French comedy, although Moliere was in the zenith of his reputation, appears not to have possessed equal charms for the English monarch. The same restraint of decorum, which prevented the expression of natural passion in tragedy, prohibited all indelicate license in comedy. Charles, probably, was secretly pleased with a system, which cramped the effusions of a tragic muse, and forbade, as indecorous, those bursts of rapturous enthusiasm, which might sometimes contain matter unpleasing to a royal ear.[2] But the merry mo-

[1] Dedication to the «Indian Emperor.»

[2] In this particular, a watch was kept over the stage. The «Maid's Tragedy,» which turns upon the seduction of Evadne by a licentious and profligate king, was prohibited during the reign of Charles II., as admitting certain unfavourable applications. The moral was not consolatory,—

———«on lustful kings,
Unlook'd for sudden deaths from heaven are sent.»

See Cibber's *Apology*, p. 199. Waller, in compliment to the court, wrote a 5th Act, in which that admired drama is terminated less tragically.

narch saw no good reason why the muse of comedy should be compelled to « dwell in decencies for ever, » and did not feel at all degraded when enjoying a gross pleasantry, or profane witticism, in company with the mixed mass of a popular audience. The stage, therefore, resumed more than its original license under his auspices. Most of our early plays, being written in a coarse age, and designed for the amusement of a promiscuous and vulgar audience, were dishonoured by scenes of coarse and naked indelicacy. The positive enactments of James, and the grave manners of his son, in some degree repressed this disgraceful scurrility; and, in the common course of events, the English stage would have been gradually delivered from this reproach, by the increasing influence of decency and taste.[1] But Charles II., during his exile, had lived upon a footing of equality with his banished nobles, and partaken freely and promiscuously in the pleasure and frolics by which they had endeavoured to sweeten adversity. To such a court the amusements of the drama would have appeared insipid, unless seasoned with the libertine spirit which governed their

[1] It was a part of the duty of the master of the revels to read over, and correct the improprieties of such plays as were to be brought forward. Several instances occur, in Sir Henry Herbert's Office-book, of the exercise of his authority in this point.—See Malone's *History of the Stage.*

lives, and which was encouraged by the example of the monarch. Thus it is acutely argued by Dennis, in reply to Collier, that the depravity of the theatre, when revived, was owing to that very suppression, which had prevented its gradual reformation. And just so a muddy stream, if allowed its free course, will gradually purify itself; but, if dammed up for a season, and let loose at once, its first torrent cannot fail to be impregnated with every impurity. The license of a rude age was thus revived by a corrupted one; and even those plays which were translated from the French and Spanish, were carefully seasoned with as much indelicacy, and *double entendre*, as was necessary to fit them for the ear of the wittiest and most profligate of monarchs.

Another remarkable feature in the comedies which succeeded the Restoration, is the structure of their plot, which was not, like that of the tragedies, formed upon the Parisian model. The English audience had not patience for the regular comedy of their neighbours, depending upon delicate turns of expression, and nicer delineation of character. The Spanish comedy, with its bustle, machinery, disguise, and complicated intrigue, was much more agreeable to their taste. This preference did not arise entirely from what the French term the phlegm of our national character, which

cannot be affected but by powerful stimulants. It is indeed certain, that an Englishman expects his eye, as well as his ear, to be diverted by theatrical exhibition; but the thirst of novelty was another and separate reason, which affected the style of the revived drama. The number of new plays represented every season was incredible; and the authors were compelled to have recourse to that mode of composition which was most easily executed. Laboured accuracy of expression, and fine traits of character, joined to an arrangement of action, which should be at once pleasing, interesting, and probable, requires sedulous study, deep reflection, and long and repeated correction and revision. But these were not to be expected from a play-wright, by whom three dramas were to be produced in one season; and in their place were substituted adventures, surprises, rencontres, mistakes, disguises, and escapes, all easily accomplished by the intervention of sliding pannels, closets, veils, masks, large cloaks, and dark lanterns. If the dramatist was at a loss for employing these convenient implements, the fifteen hundred plays of Lope de Vega were at hand for his instruction; presenting that rapid succession of events, and those sudden changes in the situation of the personages, which, according to the noble biographer of

the Spanish dramatist, are the charms by which he interests us so forcibly in his plots.[1] These Spanish plays had already been resorted to by the authors of the earlier part of the century. But under the auspices of Charles II., who must often have witnessed the originals while abroad, and in some instances by his express command, translations were executed of the best and most lively Spanish comedies.[2]

The favourite comedies, therefore, after the Restoration, were such as depended rather upon the intricacy, than the probability, of the plot; rather upon the vivacity and liveliness, than on the natural expression of the dialogue; and, finally, rather upon extravagant and grotesque conception of character, than upon its being pointedly delineated, and accurately supported through the representation. These particulars, in which the comedies of Charles the Second's reign differ from the example set by Shakspeare, Massinger, and Beaumont and Fletcher, seem to have been derived from the Spanish model. But the taste of the age

[1] Lord Holland's «Life of Lope de Vega,» p. 128.

[2] The «Wild Gallant,» which Charles commanded to be performed before him more than once, was of the class of Spanish comedies. The «Maiden Queen,» which the witty monarch honoured with the title of *his play*, is in the same division. Sir Samuel Tuke's «Adventures of Five Hours,» and Crowne's «Sir Courtly Nice,» were both translated from the Spanish by the king's express recommendation.

was too cultivated to follow the stage of Madrid, in introducing, or, to speak more accurately, in reviving, the character of the *gracioso*, or clown, upon that of London.[1] Some-

[1] The *gracioso*, or buffoon, according to Lord Holland, held an intermediate character between a spectator and a character in the play; interrupting with his remarks, at one time, the performance, of which he forms an essential, but very defective part, in another. His part was, I presume, partly written, partly extempore. Something of the kind was certainly known upon our stage. Wilson and Tarleton, in their capacity of clowns, entered freely into a contest of wit with the spectators, which was not at all held inconsistent with their having a share in the performance. Nor was tragedy exempted from their interference. Hall, after telling us of a tragic representation, informs us,

> "Now least such frightful showes of fortune's fall,
> And bloudy tyrants' rage, should chance appall
> The dead-struck audience, 'midst the silent rout
> Comes leaping in a selfe-misformed lout,
> And laughes, and grins, and frames his mimick face,
> And justles straight into the prince's place:
> Then doth the theatre echo all aloud
> With gladsome noyse of that applauding croud.
> A goodly hoch-poch, when vile russettings
> Are matcht with monarchs and with mighty kings."

This extemporal comic part seems to have been held essential to dramatic representation, in most countries in Europe, during the infancy of the art. A personification of the same kind is still retained in the lower kinds of popular exhibitions; and the clowns to the shows of tumbling and horsemanship, with my much-respected friend Mr Punch in a puppet-show, bear a pretty close resemblance to the *gracioso* of the Spaniards, the *arlequino* of the Italians, and the clown of the ancient English drama.—See Malone's *History of the Stage.*

thing of foreign manners may be traced in the license assumed by valets, and domestics, in the English comedy; a freedom which at no time made a part of our national manners, though something like it may still be traced upon the continent. These seem to be the leading characteristics of the comedies of Charles the Second's reign; in which the rules of the ancients were totally disregarded. It were to be wished that the authors could have been exculpated from a heavier charge,—that of assisting to corrupt the nation, by nourishing and fomenting their evil passions, as well as by indulging and pandering to their vices.

The theatres, after the Restoration, were limited to two in number; a restriction perhaps necessary, as the exclusive patent expresses it, in regard of the extraordinary licentiousness then used in dramatic representation; but for which no very good reason can be shown, when they are at least harmless, if not laudable places of amusement. One of these privileged theatres was placed under the direction of Sir William D'Avenant, whose sufferings in the royal cause merited a provision, and whose taste and talents had been directed towards the drama even during its proscription. He is said to have introduced moveable scenes upon the English stage; and, without entering into the dispute of how closely this is to be interpreted, we are certain that he added much to

its splendour and decoration. His set of performers, which contained the famous Betterton, and others of great merit, was called the Duke's Company. The other licensed theatre was placed under the direction of Thomas Killigrew, much famed by tradition for his colloquial wit, but the merit of whose good things evaporated as soon as he attempted to interweave them with comedy. His performers formed what was entitled the King's Company. With this last theatre Dryden particularly connected himself, by a contract to be hereafter mentioned. None of his earlier plays were acted by the Duke's Company, unless those in which he had received assistance from others, whom he might think as well entitled as himself to prescribe the place of representation.

Such was the state of the English drama when Dryden became a candidate for theatrical laurels. So early as the year of the Restoration, he had meditated a tragedy upon the fate of the Duke of Guise; but this, he has informed us, was suppressed by the advice of some friends, who told him, that it was an excellent subject, but not so artificially managed as to render it fit for the stage. It were to be wished these scenes had been preserved, since it may be that the very want of artifice, alleged by the critics of the day, would have recommended them to our more simple taste. We

might at least have learned from them, whether Dryden, in his first essay, leant to the heroic, or to the ancient English tragedy. But the scene of Guise's return to Paris, is the only part of the original sketch which Dryden thought fit to interweave with the play, as acted in 1682; and as that scene is rendered literally from Davila, upon the principle that, in so remarkable an action, the poet was not at liberty to change the words actually used by the persons interested, we only learn from it, that the piece was composed in blank verse, not rhyme.

In the course of the year 1661-2, our author composed the «Wild Gallant,» which was acted about February 1662-3 without success. The beautiful Countess of Castlemain, afterwards Duchess of Cleveland, extended her protection to the unfortunate performance, and received the incense of the author, who boasts,

> «Posterity will judge by my success,
> I had the Grecian poet's happiness,
> Who, waiving plots, found out a better way,—
> Some god descended, and preserved the play.»

It was probably by the influence of this royal favourite, that the «Wild Gallant» was more than once performed before Charles by his own command. But the author, his piece, and his poetical compliment, were hardly treated in a Session of the Poets, which appeared about 1670. Nor did Sir Robert How-

ard, his associate, escape without his share of ridicule:

« Sir Robert Howard, call'd for over and over,
At length sent in Teague with a packet of news,
Wherein the sad knight, to his grief, did discover
How Dryden had lately robb'd him of his Muse.

« Each man in the court was pleased with the theft,
Which made the whole family swear and rant,
Desiring, their Robin in the lurch being left,
The thief might be punish'd for his 'Wild Gallant.'

« Dryden, who one would have thought had more wit,
The censure of every man did disdain,
Pleading some pitiful rhymes he had writ
In praise of the Countess of Castlemaine. »

The play itself contained too many of those prize-fights of wit, as Buckingham called them, in which the plot stood absolutely still, while two of the characters were showing the audience their dexterity at repartee. This error furnishes matter for a lively scene in the « Rehearsal. »

The « Rival Ladies, » acted in 1663, and published in the year following, was our author's next dramatic essay. It is a tragi-comedy; and the tragic scenes are executed in rhyme,—a style which Dryden anxiously defends, in a Dedication addressed to the Earl of Orrery, who had himself written several heroic plays. He cites against blank verse the universal practice of the most polished and civilized nations, the Spanish, the Italian, and

the French; enumerates its advantages in restraining the luxuriance of the poet's imagination, and compelling him to labour long upon his clearest and richest thoughts: but he qualifies his general assertion by affirming, that heroic verse ought only to be applied to heroic situations and personages; and shows to most advantage in the scenes of argumentation, on which the doing or forbearing some considerable action should depend. Accordingly, in the «Rival Ladies,» those scenes of the play which approach to comedy (for it contains none properly comic), are written in blank verse. The Dedication contains two remarkable errors: the author mistakes the title of «Ferrex and Porrex,» a play written by Sackville Lord Buckhurst, and Norton; and he ascribes to Shakspeare the first introduction of blank verse. The «Rival Ladies» seems to have been well received, and was probably of some advantage to the author.

In 1663-4, we find Dryden assisting Sir Robert Howard, who must be termed his friend, if not his patron, in the composition of a rhyming play, called the «Indian Queen.» The versification of this piece, which is far more harmonious than that generally used by Howard, shows evidently that our author had assiduously corrected the whole play, though it may be difficult to say how much of it was written by him. Clifford afterwards upbraid-

ed Dryden with having copied his Almanzor from the character of Montezuma;[1] and it must be allowed, there is a striking resemblance between these two outrageous heroes, who carry conquest to any side they choose, and are restrained by no human consideration, excepting the tears or commands of their mistress. But whatever share Dryden had in this piece, Sir Robert Howard retained possession of the title page without acknowledgment, and Dryden nowhere gives himself the trouble of reclaiming his property, except in a sketch of the connexion between the « Indian Queen, » and « Indian Emperor, » where he simply states, that he wrote a part of the former. The « Indian Queen» was acted with very great applause, to which, doubtless, the scenery and dresses contributed not a little. Moreover, it presented battles and sacrifices on the stage, aërial demons singing in the air, and the god of dreams ascending through a trap; the least of which has often saved a worse tragedy. Evelyn, who witnessed this exhibition, has recorded, that the scenes were the richest ever seen in England, or perhaps elsewhere, upon a public stage.[2]

The « Indian Queen» having been thus successful, Dryden was encouraged to engraft

[1] Notes on Mr Dryden's Poems, 1687.

[2] Evelyn's Memoirs, 5th February, 1664.

upon it another drama, entitled, the « Indian Emperor.» It is seldom that the continuation of a concluded tale is acceptable to the public. The present case was an exception, perhaps because the connexion between the « Indian Emperor» and its predecessor was neither close nor necessary. Indeed, the whole persons of the « Indian Queen» are disposed of by the bowl and dagger, at the conclusion of that tragedy, excepting Montezuma, who, with a second set of characters, the sons and daughters of those deceased in the first part, occupies the stage in the second play. The author might, therefore, have safely left the audience to discover the plot of the « Indian Emperor,» without embarrassing them with that of the « Indian Queen.» But to prevent mistakes, and principally, I should think, to explain the appearance of three ghosts, the only persons (if they can be termed such) who have any connexion with the former drama, Dryden took the precaution to print and disperse an argument of the play, in order, as the « Rehearsal» intimated, to insinuate into the audience some conception of his plot. The « Indian Emperor» was probably the first of Dryden's performances which drew upon him, in an eminent degree, the attention of the public. It was dedicated to Anne, Duchess of Monmouth, whom long afterward our author

styled his first and best patroness.[1] This lady, in the bloom of youth and wit, and married to a nobleman no less the darling of his father than of the nation, had it in her power effectually to serve Dryden, and doubtless exerted her influence in procuring him that rank in public opinion, which is seldom early attained without the sanction of those who lead the fashion in literature. The Duchess of Monmouth probably liked in the «Indian Emperor,» not only the beauty of the numbers, and the frequently exquisite turn of the description, but also the introduction of incantations and apparitions, of which romantic style of writing she was a professed admirer. The «Indian Emperor» had the most ample success; and, from the time of its representation till the day of his death, our author, though often rudely assailed, maintained the very pinnacle of poetical superiority, against all his contemporaries.

The dreadful fire of London, in 1666, put a temporary stop to theatrical exhibitions, which were not permitted till the following Christmas. We may take this opportunity to review the effect which the rise of Dryden's reputation had upon his private fortune and habits of life.

[1] Preface to «King Arthur.»

While our author was the literary assistant of Sir Robert Howard, and the hired labourer of Herringman the bookseller, we may readily presume, that his pretensions and mode of living were necessarily adapted to that mode of life, into which he had descended by the unpopularity of his puritanical connexions. Even for some time after his connexion with the theatre, we learn, from a contemporary, that his dress was plain at least, if not mean, and his pleasures moderate, though not inelegant.[1] But as his reputation advanced, he naturally glided into more expensive habits, and began to avail himself of the licence, as well as to partake of the pleasures, of the time. We learn from a poem of his enemy Milbourne, that Dryden's person was advantageous; and that, in the younger part of his life, he was distinguished by the emulous favour of the fair sex.[2] And although it

[1] «I remember,» says a correspondent of the 'Gentleman's Magazine, for 1745,' «plain John Dryden, before he paid his court with success to the great, in one uniform clothing of Norwich-drugget. I have eat tarts with him and Madam Reeve at the Mulberry garden, when our author advanced to a sword and a Chadreux wig.»—Page 99.

[2] He describes him as,

> Still smooth, as when adorn'd with youthful pride,
> For thy dear sake the blushing virgins died,
> When the kind gods of wit and love combined,
> And with large gifts thy yielding soul refined.

would not be edifying, were it possible, to trace instances of his success in gallantry, we may barely notice his intrigue with Mrs Reeves, a beautiful actress, who performed in many of his plays. This amour was probably terminated before the fair lady's retreat to a cloister, which seems to have taken place before the representation of Otway's «Don Carlos,» in 1676.[1] Their connexion is alluded to in the «Rehearsal,» which was acted in 1671. Bayes, talking of Amarillis, actually represented by Mrs Reeves, says, «Ay, 'tis a pretty little rogue; she's my mistress: I knew her face would set off armour extremely; and, to tell you true, I writ that part only for her.» There follows an obscure allusion to some gallantry of our author in another quarter. But Dryden's amours were interrupted, if not terminated, in 1665, by his marriage.

Our author's friendship with Sir Robert Howard, and his increasing reputation, had introduced him to the family of the Earl of Berkshire, father to his friend. In the course of this intimacy, the poet gained the affections of Lady Elizabeth Howard, the Earl's eldest daughter, whom he soon afterwards married.

[1] The epilogue has these lines:

But now if by my suit you 'll not be won,
You know what your unkindness oft has done,—
I 'll e'en forsake the playhouse, and turn nun.

The lampoons, by which Dryden's private character was assailed in all points, allege, that this marriage was formed under circumstances dishonourable to the lady. But of this there is no evidence; while the malignity of the reporters is evident and undisguised. We may however believe, that the match was not altogether agreeable to the noble family of Berkshire. Dryden, it is true, might, in point of descent, be admitted to form pretensions to lady Elizabeth Howard; but his family, though honourable, was in a kind of disgrace, from the part which Sir Gilbert Pickering and Sir John Driden had taken in the civil Wars: while the Berkshire family were remarkable for their attachment to the royal cause. Besides, many of the poet's relations were engaged in trade; and the alliance of his brothers-in-law, the tobacconist and stationer, if it was then formed, could not sound dignified in the ears of a Howard. Add to this a very important consideration,—Dryden had no chance of sharing the wealth of his principal relations, which might otherwise have been received as an atonement for the guilty confiscations by which it was procured. He had quarrelled with them, or they with him; his present possession was a narrow independence; and his prospects were founded upon literary success, always precarious, and then connected

with circumstances of personal abasement, which rendered it almost disreputable. A noble family might be allowed to regret, that one of their members was chiefly to rely for the maintenance of her husband, her family, and herself, upon the fees of dedications, and occasional pieces of poetry, and the uncertain profits of the theatre.

Yet, as Dryden's manners were amiable, his reputation high, and his moral character unexceptionable, the Earl of Berkshire was probably soon reconciled to the match; and Dryden seems to have resided with his father-in-law for some time, since it is from the Earl's seat of Charlton, in Wiltshire, that he dates the Introduction to the «*Annus Mirabilis*,» published in the end of 1667.

So honourable a connexion might have been expected to have advanced our author's prospects in a degree beyond what he experienced; but his father-in-law was poor, considering his rank, and had a large family, so that the portion of Lady Elizabeth was inconsiderable. Nor was her want of fortune supplied by patronage, or family influence. Dryden's preferment, as poet laureat, was due to, and probably obtained by, his literary character; nor did he ever receive any boon suitable to his rank, as son-in-law to an earl. But, what was worst of all, the parties did not find mutual happiness in the engage-

ment they had formed. It is difficult for a woman of a violent temper and weak intellects, and such the lady seems to have been, to endure the apparently causeless fluctuation of spirits incident to one doomed to labour incessantly in the feverish exercise of the imagination. Unintentional neglect, and the inevitable relaxation, or rather sinking of spirit, which follows violent mental exertion, are easily misconstrued into capricious rudeness, or intentional offence; and life is embittered by mutual accusation, not the less intolerable because reciprocally just. The wife of one who is to gain his livelihood by poetry, or by any labour (if any there be) equally exhausting, must either have taste enough to relish her husband's performances, or good-nature sufficient to pardon his infirmities. It was Dryden's misfortune, that Lady Elizabeth had neither the one nor the other; and I dismiss the disagreeable subject by observing, that on no one occasion, when a sarcasm against matrimony could be introduced, has our author failed to season it with such bitterness, as spoke an inward consciousness of domestic misery.

During the period when the theatres were closed, Dryden seems to have written and published the «*Annus Mirabilis*,» of which we spoke at the close of the last section. But he

was also then labouring upon his «Essay of dramatic poesy.» It was a singular trait in the character of our author, that by whatever motive he was directed in his choice of a subject, and his manner of treating it, he was, upon all occasions, alike anxious to persuade the public, that both the one and the other were the object of his free choice, founded upon the most rational grounds of preference. He had, therefore, no sooner seriously bent his thoughts to the stage, and distinguished himself as a composer of heroic plays, than he wrote his «Essay of dramatic poesy,» in which he assumes, that the drama was the highest department of poetry; and endeavours to prove, that rhyming or heroic tragedies are the most legitimate offspring of the drama.

The subject is agitated in a dialogue between Lord Buckhurst, Sir Charles Sedley, Sir Robert Howard, and the author himself, under the feigned names of Eugenius, Lisideius, Crites, and Neander. This celebrated essay was first published in the end of 1667, or beginning of 1668. The author revised it with an unusual degree of care, and published it anew in 1684, with a dedication to Lord Buckhurst.

In the introduction of the dialogue, our author artfully solicits the attention of the public to the improved versification, in which he

himself so completely excelled all his contemporaries; and contrasts the rugged lines and barbarous conceits of Cleveland with the more modern style of composition, where the thoughts were moulded into easy and significant words, superfluities of expression retrenched, and the rhyme rendered so properly a part of the verse, that it was led and guided by the sense, which was formerly sacrificed in attaining it. This point being previously settled, a dispute occurs concerning the alleged superiority of the ancient classic models of dramatic composition. This is resolutely denied by all the speakers, excepting Crites; the regulation of the unities is condemned, as often leading to greater absurdities than those they were designed to obviate; and the classic authors are censured for the cold and trite subjects of their comedies, the bloody and horrible topics of many of their tragedies, and their deficiency in painting the passion of love. From all this, it is justly gathered, that the moderns, though with less regularity, possess a greater scope for invention, and have discovered, as it were, a new perfection in writing. This debated point being abandoned by Crites (or Howard), the partizan of the ancients, a comparison between the French and English drama is next introduced. Sedley, the celebrated wit and courtier, pleads the

cause of the French, an opinion which perhaps was not singular among the favourites of Charles II. But the rest of the speakers unite in condemning the extolled simplicity of the French plots, as actual barrenness, compared to the variety and copiousness of the English stage; and their authors' limiting the attention of the audience and interest of the piece to a single principal personage, is censured as poverty of imagination, when opposed to the diversification of characters exhibited in the *dramatis personæ* of the English poets. Shakspeare and Jonson are then brought forward, and contrasted with the French dramatists, and with each other. The former is extolled, as the man of all modern, and perhaps ancient, poets, who had the largest and most comprehensive soul, and intuitive knowledge of human nature; and the latter, as the most learned and judicious writer which any theatre ever had. But to Shakspeare, Dryden objects, that his comic sometimes degenerates into *clenches*, and his serious into bombast; to Jonson, the sullen and saturnine character of his genius, his borrowing from the ancients, and the insipidity of his latter plays. The examen leads to the discussion of a point, in which Dryden had differed with Sir Robert Howard. This was the use of rhyme in tragedy. Our author had, it will be remembered, maintained the

superiority of rhyming plays, in the Introduction to the «Rival Ladies.» Sir Robert Howard, the catalogue of whose virtues did not include that of forbearance, made a direct answer to the arguments used in the Introduction; and while he studiously extolled the plays of Lord Orrery, as affording an exception to his general sentence against rhyming plays, he does not extend the compliment to Dryden, whose defence of rhyme was expressly dedicated to that noble author. Dryden, not much pleased, perhaps, at being left undistinguished in the general censure passed upon rhyming plays by his friend and ally, retaliates in the essay, by placing in the mouth of Crites the arguments urged by Sir Robert Howard, and replying to them in the person of Neander. To the charge, that rhyme is unnatural, in consequence of the inverted arrangement of the words necessary to produce it, he replies, that, duly ordered, it may be natural in itself, and therefore not unnatural in a play; and that, if the objection be further insisted upon, it is equally conclusive against blank verse, or measure without rhyme. To the objection founded on the formal and uniform recurrence of the measure, he alleges the facility of varying it, by throwing the cadence upon different parts of the line, by breaking it into hemistiches, or by running the sense into another

line, so as to make art and order appear as loose and free as nature.[1] Dryden even contends, that, for variety's sake, the Pindaric measure might be admitted, of which D'Avenant set an example in the «Siege of Rhodes.» But this license, which was probably borrowed from the Spanish stage, has never succeeded elsewhere, except in operas. Finally, it is urged, that rhyme, the most noble verse, is alone fit for tragedies, the most noble species of composition; that, far from injuring a scene in which quick repartee is necessary, it is the last perfection of wit to put it into numbers; and that, even where a trivial and common expression is placed, from necessity, in the mouth of an important character, it receives, from the melody of versification, a dignity befitting the person that is to pronounce it. With this keen and animated defence of a mode of composition, in which he felt his own excellence, Dryden concludes the «Essay of dramatic poesy.»

The publication of this criticism, the first that contained an express attempt to regulate dramatic writing, drew general attention, and gave some offence. Sir Robert Howard felt

[1] Sandford, a most judicious actor, is said, by Cibber, cautiously to have observed this rule, in order to avoid surfeiting the audience by the continual recurrence of rhyme.

no ways flattered at being made, through the whole dialogue, the champion of unsuccessful opinions: and a partiality to the depreciated blank verse seems to have been hereditary in his family.[1] He therefore hasted to assert his own opinion against that of Dryden, in the preface to one of his plays, called the «Duke of Lerma,» published in the middle of the year 1668. It is difficult for two friends to preserve their temper in a dispute of this nature; and there may be reason to believe, that some dislike to the alliance of Dryden, as a brother-in-law, mingled with the poetical jealousy of Sir Robert Howard. The preface to the «Duke of Lerma» is written in the tone of a man of quality and importance, who is conscious of stooping beneath his own dignity, and neglecting his graver avocations, by engaging in a literary dispute. Dryden was not likely, of many men, to brook this tone of affected superiority. He retorted upon Sir Robert Howard very

[1] The honourable Edward Howard, Sir Robert's brother, expresses himself in the preface to the «Usurper,» a play published in 1668, «not insensible to the disadvantage it may receive passing into the world upon the naked feet of verse, with other works that have their measures adorned with the trappings of rhyme, which, however they have succeeded in wit or design, is still thought music, as the heroic tone now goes; but whether so natural to a play, that should most nearly imitate, in some cases, our familiar converse, the judicious may easily determine.»

severely, in a tract, entitled, the «Defence of the Essay on dramatic poesy,» which he prefixed to the second edition of the «Indian Emperor,» published in 1678. In this piece, the author mentions his antagonist as master of more than twenty legions of arts and sciences, in ironical allusion to Sir Robert's coxcomical affectation of universal knowledge, which had already exposed him to the satire of Shadwell.[1] He is also described, in reference to some foolish appearance in the House of Commons, as having maintained a contradiction *in terminis*, in the face of three hundred persons. Neither does Dryden neglect to hold up to ridicule the slips in Latin and English grammar, which marked the offensive preface to the «Duke of Lerma.» And although he concludes, that he honoured his adversary's parts and person as much as any man living, and had so many particular obligations to him, that he should be very ungrateful not to acknowledge them to the world, yet the personal and contemptuous severity of the whole piece must have cut to the heart so

[1] Who drew Sir Robert in the character of Sir Positive Atall in the «Sullen Lovers;» a foolish knight, that pretends to understand every thing in the world, and will suffer no man to understand any thing in his company; so foolishly positive, that he will never be convinced of an error, though never so gross. This character is supported with great humour.

proud a man as Sir Robert Howard. This quarrel between the baronet and the poet, who was suspected of having crutched up many of his lame performances, furnished food for lampoon and amusement to the indolent wits of the day. But the breach between the brothers-in-law, though wide, proved fortunately not irreconcileable; and towards the end of Dryden's literary career, we find him again upon terms of friendship with the person by whom he had been befriended at its commencement.[1] Edward Howard, who, it appears, had entered as warmly as his brother into the contest with Dryden about rhyming tragedies, also seems to have been reconciled to our poet; at least he pronounced a panegyric on his translation of Virgil before it left the press, in a passage which is also curious, from the author ranking in the same line «the two elaborate poems of Blackmore and Milton.»[2] In testimony of total amnesty, the

[1] In a letter from Dryden to Tonson, dated 26th May, 1696, in which he reckons upon Sir Robert Howard's assistance in a pecuniary transaction.

[2] «I am informed Mr Dryden is now translating of Virgil; and although I must own it is a fault to forestall or anticipate the praise of a man in his labours, yet, big with the greatness of the work, and the vast capacity of the author, I cannot here forbear saying, that Mr Dryden, in the translating of Virgil, will of a certain make Maro speak better than ever Maro thought. Besides those al-

«Defence of the Essay» was cancelled; and it must be rare indeed to meet with an original edition of it, since Mr Malone had never seen one.[1]

Dryden's fame, as an author, was doubt-

ready mentioned, there are other ingredients and essential parts of poetry, necessary for the forming of a truly great and happy genius, viz. a free air and sprit, a vigorous and well-governed thought, which are, as it were, the soul which inform and animate the whole mass and body of verse. But these are such divine excellencies as are peculiar only to the brave and the wise. The first chief in verse, who trode in this sweet and delightful path of the Muses, was the renowned Earl of Roscommon, a great worthy, as well as a great wit; and who is, in all respects, resembled by another great Lord of this present age, viz. my Lord Cutts, a person whom all people must allow to be an accomplished gentleman, a great general, and a fine poet.

«The two elaborate poems of Blackmore and Milton, the which, for the dignity of them, may very well be looked upon as the two grand exemplars of poetry, do either of them exceed, and are more to be valued than all the poets, both of the Romans and the Greeks put together. There are two other incomparable pieces of poetry, viz. Mr Dryden's 'Absalom and Achitophel,' and the epistle of a known and celebrated wit (*Mr Charles Montague*) to my Lord of Dorset, the best judge in poetry, as well as the best poet; the tutelar *numen* o' the stage, and on whose breath all the Muses have their dependence.»—*Proem to an Essay on Pastoral, and Elegy on Queen Mary, by the Honourable Edward Howard, 21st January*, 1695.

[1] That now before me is prefixed to the second edition of the «Indian Emperor.» 1668.

less exalted by the «Essay of dramatic poesy;» which showed, that he could not only write plays, but defend them when written. His circumstances rendered it necessary, that he should take the full advantage of his reputation to meet the increasing expence of a wife and family; and it was probably shortly after the Essay appeared, that our author entered into his memorable contract with the King's Company of players. The precise terms of this agreement have been settled by Mr Malone from unquestionable evidence, after being the subject of much doubt and uncertainty. It is now certain that, confiding in the fertility of his genius, and the readiness of his pen, Dryden undertook to write for the King's house no less than three plays in the course of the year. In consideration of this engagement, he was admitted to hold one share and a quarter in the profits of the theatre, which was stated by the managers to have produced him three or four hundred pounds, *communibus annis*. Either, however, the players became sensible that, by urging their pensioner to continued drudgery, they in fact lessened the value of his labour, or Dryden felt himself unequal to perform the task he had undertaken; for the average number of plays which he produced was only about half that which had been con-

tracted for. The company, though not without grudging, paid the poet the stipulated share of profit; and the curious document, recovered by Mr Malone, not only establishes the terms of the bargain, but that the players, although they complained of the laziness of their indented author, were jealous of their right to his works, and anxious to retain possession of him, and of them.[1] It would have been well for

[1] It seems to have been a memorial addressed to the Lord Chamberlain for the time, and was long in the possession of the Killigrew family. It was communicated by the learned Mr Reed to Mr Malone, and runs as follows:—

«Whereas, upon Mr Dryden's binding himself to write *three playes* a-yeere, he, the said Mr Dryden, was admitted, and continued as a sharer, in the King's Playhouse for diverse years, and received for his share and a quarter, three or four hundred pounds, *communibus annis;* but though he received the moneys, we received not the playes, not one in a yeare. After which, the House being burnt, the Company, in building another, contracted great debts, so that the shares fell much short of what they were formerly. Thereupon, Mr Dryden complaining to the Company of his want of proffit, the Company was so kind to him, that they not only did not presse him for the playes which he so engaged to write for them, and for which he was paid beforehand, but they did also, at his earnest request, give him a third day for his last new play, called «All for Love;» and at the receipt of the money of the said third day, he acknowledged it as a guift, and a particular kindnesse of the Company. Yet, notwithstanding this kind proceeding, Mr Dryden has now, jointly with Mr Lee (who was in pension with us to the last day

Dryden's reputation, and perhaps not less productive to the company, had the number of his plays been still farther abridged; for, while we admire the facility that could produce five or six plays in three years, we lament to find it so often exerted to the sacrifice of the more essential qualities of originality and correctness.

Dryden had, however, made his bargain, and was compelled to fulfil it the best he

of our playing, and shall continue), written a play, called 'OEdipus,' and given it to the Duke's Company, contrary to his said agreement, his promise, and all gratitude, to the great prejudice and almost undoing of the Company, they being the only poets remaining to us. Mr Crowne, being under the like agreement with the Duke's House, writt a play, called the 'Destruction of Jerusalem,' and being forced, by their refusall of it, to bring it to us, the said Company compelled us, after the studying of it, and a vast expence in scenes and cloathes, to buy off their clayme, by paying all the pension he had received from them, amounting to one hundred and twelve pounds paid by the King's Company, besides neere forty pounds he, the said Mr Crowne, paid out of his owne pocket.

«These things considered, if, notwithstanding Mr Dryden's said agreement, promise, and moneys, freely given him for his said last new play, and the many titles we have to his writings, this play be judged away from us, we must submit.

(Signed) «Charles Killigrew/
Charles Hart.
Rich. Burt.
Cardell Goodman.
Mic Mohun.»

might. As his last tragic piece, the «Indian Emperor,» had been eminently successful, he was next to show the public, that his talents were not limited to the buskin; and accordingly, late in 1667, was represented the «Maiden Queen,» a tragi-comedy, in which, although there is a comic plot separate from the tragic design, our author boasts to have retained all that regularity and symmetry of parts which the dramatic laws require. The tragic scenes of the «Maiden Queen» were deservedly censured, as falling beneath the «Indian Emperor.» They have neither the stately march of the heroic dialogue, nor, what we would be more pleased to have found in them, the truth of passion, and natural colouring, which characterized the old English drama. But the credit of the piece was redeemed by the comic part, which is a more light and airy representation of the fashionable and licentious manners of the time than Dryden could afterwards exhibit, excepting in «Marriage a-la-Mode.» The king, whose judgment on this subject was unquestionable, graced the «Maiden Queen» with the title of *his play;* and Dryden insinuates that it would have been dedicated to him, had he had confidence to follow the practice of the French poets in like cases. At least, he avoided the solecism of inscribing the

king's own play to a subject; and, instead of a dedication, we have a preface, in which the sovereign's favourable opinion of the piece is studiously insisted upon. Neither was the praise of Charles conferred without critical consideration; for he justly censured the concluding scene, in which Celadon and Florimel treat of their marriage in very light terms in presence of the Queen, who stands by, an idle spectator. This insult to Melpomene, and preference of her comic sister, our author acknowledges to be a fault, but seemingly only in deference to the royal opinion; for he instantly adds, that, in his own judgment, the scene was necessary to make the piece go off smartly, and was, in the estimation of good judges, the most diverting of the whole comedy.

Encouraged by the success of the «Maiden Queen,» Dryden proceeded to revive the «Wild Gallant;» and, in deference to his reputation, it seems now to have been more favourably received than at its first representation.

The «Maiden Queen» was followed by the «Tempest,» an alteration of Shakspeare's play of the same name, in which Dryden was assisted by Sir William D'Avenant. It seems probable that Dryden furnished the language, and D'Avenant the plan of the new characters introduced. They do but little ho-

nour to his invention, although Dryden has highly extolled it in his preface. The idea of a counterpart to Shakspeare's plot, by introducing a man who had never seen a woman, as a contrast to a woman who had never seen a man, and by furnishing Caliban with a sister monster, seems hardly worthy of the delight with which Dryden says he filled up the characters so sketched. In mixing his tints, Dryden did not omit that peculiar colouring, in which his age delighted. Miranda's simplicity is converted into indelicacy, and Dorinda talks the language of prostitution before she has ever seen a man. But the play seems to have succeeded to the utmost wish of the authors. It was brought out in the Duke's house, of which D'Avenant was manager, with all the splendour of scenic decoration, of which he was inventor. The opening scene is described as being particularly splendid, and the performance of the spirits, «with mops and mows,» excited general applause. D'Avenant died before the publication of this piece, and his memory is celebrated in the preface.

Our author's next play, if it could be properly called his, was «Sir Martin Mar-all.» This was originally a translation of «*L'Etourdi*» of Moliere, executed by the Duke of Newcastle, famous for his loyalty, and his

skill in horsemanship. Dryden availed himself of the noble translator's permission to improve and bring «Sir Martin Mar-all» forward for his own benefit. It was attended with the most complete success, being played four times at court, and above thirty times at the theatre in Lincoln's-Inn Fields; a run chiefly attributed to the excellent performance of Nokes, who represented Sir Martin.[1] The «Tempest» and «Sir Martin

[1] Cibber, with his usual vivacity, thus describes the comic powers of Nokes in this admired character; and many of the traits remind us strongly of our own excellent Liston:

«In the ludicrous distresses, which, by the laws of comedy, folly is often involved in, he sunk into such a mixture of piteous pusillanimity, and a consternation so ruefully ludicrous and inconsolable, that when he had shook you to a fatigue of laughter, it became a moot point, whether you ought not to have pity'd him. When he debated any matter by himself, he would shut up his mouth with a dumb studious powt, and roll his full eye into such a vacant amazement, such palpable ignorance of what to think of it, that his silent perplexity (which would sometimes hold him several minutes) gave your imagination as full content, as the most absurd thing he could say upon it. In the character of Sir Martin Mar-all, who is always committing blunders to the prejudice of his own interest, when he had brought himself to a dilemma in his affairs, by vainly proceeding upon his own head, and was afterwards afraid to look his governing servant and counsellor in the face; what a copious and distressful harangue have I seen him make with his looks (while the house has been in one continued roar for several minutes), before he

Mar-all» were both acted by the Duke's Company, probably because Dryden was in the one assisted by Sir William D'Avenant the manager, and because the other was entered in the name of the Duke of Newcastle. Of these two plays, «Sir Martin Mar-all» was printed anonymously in 1668. It did not appear with Dryden's name until 1697. The «Tempest,» though acted before «Sir Martin Mar-all,» was not printed until 1669-70. They are in the present, as in former editions, arranged according to the date of publication, which gives the precedence to «Sir Martin Mar-all,» though last acted.

The «Evening's Love, or the Mock Astrologer,» was Dryden's next composition. It is an imitation of «*Le Feint Astrologne*,» of Corneille, which is founded upon Calderon's «*El Astrologo Fingido*.» Several of the scenes

could prevail with his courage to speak a word to him! Then might you have, at once, read in his face vexation—that his own measures, which he had piqued himself upon, had failed; envy of his servant's wit; distress—to retrieve the occasion he had lost; shame—to confess his folly; and yet a sullen desire to be reconciled, and better advised for the future! What tragedy ever showed us such a tumult of passions rising, at once, in one bosom! or what buskin hero, standing under the load of them, could have more effectually moved his spectators by the most pathetic speech, than poor miserable Nokes did by this silent eloquence, and piteous plight of his features?» Cibber's *Apology*, p. 86.

are closely imitated from Moliere's «*Depit Amoureux.*» Having that lively bustle, intricacy of plot, and surprising situation, which the taste of the time required, and being enlivened by the characters of Wildblood and Jacinta, the «Mock Astrologer» seems to have met a favourable reception in 1668, when it first appeared. It was printed in the same, or in the following year, and inscribed to the Duke of Newcastle, to whom Dryden had been indebted for the sketch of «Sir Martin Mar-all.» It would seem, that this gallant and chivalrous peer was then a protector of Dryden, though he afterwards seems more especially to have patronized his enemy Shadwell; upon whose *northern* dedications, inscribed to the duke and his lady, our author is particularly severe. In the preface to the «Evening's Love,» Dryden anxiously justifies himself from the charge of encouraging libertinism, by crowning his rake and coquette with success. But after he has arrayed all the authority of the ancient and modern poets, and has pleaded that these licentious characters are only made happy after being reclaimed in the last scene, we may be permitted to think, that more proper heroes may be selected than those, who, to merit the reward assigned them, must announce a violent and sudden change from the

character they have sustained during five acts; and the attempt to shroud himself under authority of others, is seldom resorted to by Dryden when a cause is otherwise tenable. The excellent Evelyn, who mentions seeing this play under the inaccurate title of the «Evening's Love,» adds, «A foolish plot, and very profane; it affected me to see how much the stage was degenerated and polluted by the licentious times.»[1] In this preface also he justified himself from the charge of plagiarism, by showing that the mere story is the least part either of the labour of the poet, or of the graces of the poem; quoting against his critics the expression of the king, who had said, he wished those, who charged Dryden with theft, would always steal him plays like Dryden's.

The «Royal Martyr,» was acted in 1668-9, and printed in 1670. It is, in every respect, a proper heroic tragedy, and had a large share of the applause with which those pieces were then received. It abounds in bombast, but is not deficient in specimens of the sublime and of the tender. The preface is distinguished by that tone of superiority, which Dryden often assumed over the critics of the time. Their general observations

[1] Evelyn's Memoirs, 19th June, 1668.

he cuts short, by observing, that those who make them produce nothing of their own, or only what is more ridiculous than any thing they reprehend. Special objections are refuted, by an appeal to classical authority. Thus the couplet,

> «And he, who servilely creeps after sense,
> Is safe, but ne'er will reach an excellence,»

is justified from the «*serpit humi tutus*» of Horace; and, by a still more forced derivation, the line,

> «And follow fate, which does too fast pursue,»

is said to be borrowed from Virgil,

> «*Eludit gyro interior sequiturque sequentem.*»

And he concludes by exulting, that, though he might have written nonsense, none of his critics had been so happy as to discover it. These indications of superiority, being thought to savour of vanity, had their share in exciting the storm of malevolent criticism, of which Dryden afterwards so heavily complained. «Tyrannic Love» is dedicated to the Duke of Monmouth; but it would seem the compliment was principally designed to his duchess. The duke, whom Dryden was afterwards to celebrate in very different strains, is however compared to an Achilles, or Rinaldo, who wanted only a

Homer, or Tasso, to give him the fame due to him.

It was in this period of prosperity, of general reputation, of confidence in his genius, and perhaps of presumption (if that word can be applied to Dryden), that he produced those two very singular plays, the First and Second Parts of the « Conquest of Granada.» In these models of the pure heroic drama, the ruling sentiments of love and honour are carried to the most passionate extravagance. And, to maintain the legitimacy of this style of composition, our author, ever ready to vindicate with his pen to be right, that which his timid critics murmured at as wrong, threw the gauntlet down before the admirers of the ancient English school, in the Epilogue to the « Second Part of the Conquest of Granada,» and in the Defence of that Epilogue. That these plays might be introduced to the public with a solemnity corresponding in all respects to models of the rhyming tragedy, they were inscribed to the Duke of York, and prefaced by an « Essay upon Heroic Plays.» They were performed in 1669-70, and received with unbounded applause. Before we consider the effect which they, and similar productions, produced on the public, together with the progress and decay of the taste for heroic dramas, we

may first notice the effect which the ascendancy of our author's reputation had produced upon his situation and fortunes.

Whether we judge of the rank which Dryden held in society by the splendour of his titled and powerful friends, or by his connexions among men of genius, we must consider him as occupying, at this time, as high a station, in the very foremost circle, as literary reputation could gain for its owner. Independent of the notice with which he was honoured by Charles himself, the poet numbered among his friends most of the distinguished nobility. The great Duke of Ormond had already begun that connexion, which subsisted between Dryden and three generations of the house of Butler; Thomas Lord Clifford, one of the Cabal ministry, was uniform in patronizing the poet, and appears to have been active in introducing him to the king's favour; the Duke of Newcastle, as we have seen, loved him sufficiently to present him with a play for the stage; the witty Earl of Dorset, then Lord Buckhurst, and Sir Charles Sedley, admired in that loose age for the peculiar elegance of his loose poetry, were his intimate associates, as is evident from the turn of the « Essay of dramatic poesy,» where they are speakers; Wilmot Earl of Rochester (soon to act a very different part) was then anxious to vindicate Dryden's writings, to mediate for him with those who

distributed the royal favour, and was thus careful, not only of his reputation, but his fortune. In short, the first author of what was then held the first style of poetry, was sought for by all among the great and gay who wished to maintain some character for literary taste; a description which included all of the court of Charles whom nature had not positively incapacitated from such pretension. It was then Dryden enjoyed those genial nights described in the dedication of the « Assignation, » when discourse was neither too serious nor too light, but always pleasant, and for the most part instructive; the raillery neither too sharp upon the present, nor too censorious upon the absent; and the cups such only as raised the conversation of the night, without disturbing the business of the morrow. He had not yet experienced the disadvantages attendant on such society, or learned how soon literary eminence becomes the object of detraction, of envy, of injury, even from those who can best feel its merit, if they are discouraged by dissipated habits from emulating its flight, or hardened by perverted feeling against loving its possessors.

But, besides the society of these men of wit and pleasure, Dryden enjoyed the affection and esteem of the ingenious Cowley, who wasted his brilliant talents in the unprofitable paths of metaphysical poetry; of Waller and of Denham,

who had done so much for English versification; of D'Avenant, as subtle as Cowley, and more harmonious than Denham, who, with a happier model, would probably have excelled both. Dryden was also known to Milton, though it may be doubted whether they justly appreciated the talents of each other. Of all the men of genius at this period, whose claims to immortality our age has admitted, Butler alone seems to have been the adversary of our author's reputation.

While Dryden was thus generally known and admired, the advancement of his fortune bore no equal progress to the splendour of his literary fame. Something was, however, done to assist it. The office of royal historiographer had become vacant in 1666 by the decease of James Howell, and in 1668 the death of D'Avenant opened the situation of poet laureat. These two offices, with a salary of 200*l.* paid quarterly, and the celebrated annual butt of canary, were conferred upon Dryden, 18th August, 1670. The grant bore a retrospect to the term after D'Avenant's demise, and is declared to be to « John Dryden, master of arts, in consideration of his many acceptable services theretofore done to his present Majesty, and from an observation of his learning and eminent abilities, and his great skill and elegant style, both in verse and prose.» Thus was our author placed at the head of the literary

class of his countrymen, so far as that high station could be conferred by the favour of the monarch.

If we compute Dryden's share in the theatre at 300*l.* annually, which is lower than it was rated by the actors in their petition;[1] if we make, at the same time, some allowance for those presents which authors of that time received upon presenting dedications, or occasional pieces of poetry; if we recollect, that Dryden had a small landed property, and that his wife, Lady Elizabeth, had probably some fortune, or allowance, however trifling, from her family,—I think we will fall considerably under the mark in computing the poet's income, during this period of prosperity, at 600*l.* or 700*l.* annually; a sum more adequate to procure all the comforts, and many of the luxuries, of life, than thrice the amount at present. We must, at the same time, recollect that, though Dryden is no where censured for extravagance, poets are seldom capable of minute economy, and that Lady Elizabeth was by education, and perhaps by nature, unfitted for supplying her husband's deficiencies. These halcyon days,

[1] Their account was probably exaggerated. Upon a similar occasion, the master of the revels stated the value of his winter and summer benefit plays at 50*l.* each; although, in reality, they did not, upon an average, produce him 9*l.* See Malone's *Historical Account of the Stage.*

too, were but of short duration. The burning of the theatre, in 1670, greatly injured the poet's income from that quarter; his pension, like other appointments of the household establishment of Charles II., was very irregularly paid; and thus, if his income was competent in amount, the payment was precarious and uncertain.

Leaving Dryden for the present in the situation which we have described, and which he occupied during the most fortunate period of his life, the next Section may open with an account of the public taste at this time, and of the revolution in it which shortly took place.

SECTION III.

Heroic Plays—The Rehearsal—Marriage à la Mode—The Assignation—Controversy with Clifford—with Leigh—with Ravenscroft—Massacre of Amboyna—State of Innocence.

THE rage for imitating the French stage, joined to the successful efforts of our author, had now carried the heroic or rhyming tragedy to its highest pitch of popularity. The principal requisites of such a drama are summed up by Dryden in the two first lines of the «*Orlando Furioso.*»

> «*Le donne, i cavalier, l' arme, gli amori*
> *Le cortesie, l' audaci imprese.*»—

The story thus partaking of the nature of a romance of chivalry, the whole interest of the play necessarily turned upon love and honour, those supreme idols of the days of knight-errantry. The love introduced was not of that ordinary sort, which exists between persons of common mould; it was the love of Amadis and Oriana, of Oroondates and Statira; that love

which required a sacrifice of every wish, hope, and feeling unconnected with itself, and which was expressed in the language of prayer and of adoration. It was that love which was neither to be chilled by absence, nor wasted by time, nor quenched by infidelity. No caprice in the object beloved entitled her slave to emancipate himself from her fetters; no command, however unreasonable, was to be disobeyed; if required by the fair mistress of his affections, the hero was not only to sacrifice his interest, but his friend, his honour, his word, his country, even the gratification of his love itself, to maintain the character of a submissive and faithful adorer. Much of this mystery is summed up in the following speech of Almahide to Almanzor, and his answer; from which it appears, that a lover of the true heroic vein never thought himself so happy, as when he had an opportunity of thus showing the purity and disinterestedness of his passion. Almanzor is commanded by his mistress to stay to assist his rival, the king, her husband. The lover very naturally asks,

« *Almanz.* What recompence attends me, if I stay?
Almah. You know I am from recompence debarr'd,
But I will grant your merit a reward;
Your flame's too noble to deserve a cheat,
And I too plain to practise a deceit.
I no return of love can ever make,
But what I ask is for my husband's sake;

He, I confess, has been ungrateful too,
But he and I are ruin'd if you go:
Your virtue to the hardest proof I bring;—
Unbribed, preserve a mistress and a king.
Almanz. I 'll stop at nothing that appears so brave:
I 'll do't, and now I no reward will have.
You 've given my honour such an ample field,
That I may die, but that shall never yield.»

The king, however, not perhaps understanding this nice point of honour, grows jealous, and wishes to dismiss the disinterested ally, whom his spouse's beauty had enlisted in his service. But this did not depend upon him; for Almanzor exclaims,

«*Almanz.* I wonnot go; I 'll not be forced away:
I came not for thy sake; nor do I stay.
It was the queen who for my aid did send;
And 't is I only can the queen defend:
I, for her sake, thy sceptre will maintain;
And thou, by me, in spite of thee, shalt reign.»

The most applauded scenes in these plays turned upon nice discussions of metaphysical passion, such as in the days of yore were wont to be agitated in the courts and parliaments of love. Some puzzling dilemma, or metaphysical abstraction, is argued between the personages on the stage, whose dialogue, instead of presenting a scene of natural passion, exhibits a sort of pleading, or combat of logic, in which each endeavours to defend his own opinion by catching up the idea expressed by the former speaker, and returning him his illustration, or

simile, at the rebound; and where the lover hopes every thing from his ingenuity, and trusts nothing to his passion. Thus, in the following scene between Almanzor and Almahide, the solicitations of the lover, and the denials of the queen, are expressed in the very carte and tierce of poetical argumentation:

«*Almah.* My light will sure discover those who talk.—
Who dares to interrupt my private walk?
Almanz. He, who dares love, and for that love must die,
And, knowing this, dares yet love on, am I.
Almah. That love which you can hope, and I can pay,
May be received and given in open day:
My praise and my esteem you had before;
And you have bound yourself to ask no more.
Almanz. Yes, I have bound myself; but will you take
The forfeit of that bond, which force did make?
Almah. You know you are from recompence debarr'd;
But purest love can live without reward.
Almanz. Pure love had need be to itself a feast;
For, like pure elements, 't will nourish least.
Almah. It therefore yields the only pure content;
For it, like angels, needs no nourishment.
To eat and drink can no perfection be;
All appetite implies necessity.
Almanz. 'T were well, if I could like a spirit live;
But, do not angels food to mortals give?
What if some demon should my death foreshow,
Or bid me change, and to the Christians go;
Will you not think I merit some reward,
When I my love above my life regard?
Almah. In such a case your change must be allow'd;
I would myself dispense with what you vow'd.
Almanz. Were I to die that hour when I possess,
This minute shall begin my happiness.

Almah. The thoughts of death your passion would remove;
Death is a cold encouragement to love.

Almanz. No; from my joys I to my death would run,
And think the business of my life well done:
But I should walk a discontented ghost,
If flesh and blood were to no purpose lost.»

This kind of Amabæan dialogue was early ridiculed by the ingenious author of «Hudibras.»[1] It partakes more of the Spanish than of the French tragedy, although it does not demand that the parody shall be so very strict, as to re-echo noun for noun, or verb for verb, which Lord Holland gives us as a law of the

[1] In «Repartees between Cat and Puss at a caterwauling, in the modern heroic way:»

«*Cat.* Forbear, foul ravisher, this rude address;
Canst thou at once both injure and caress?
Puss. Thou hast bewitch'd me with thy powerful charms,
And I, by drawing blood, would cure my harms.
C. He that does love would set his heart a tilt,
Ere one drop of his lady's should be spilt.
P. Your wounds are but without, and mine within:
You wound my heart, and I but prick your skin;
And while your eyes pierce deeper than my claws,
You blame the effect of which you are the cause.
C. How could my guiltless eyes your heart invade,
Had it not first been by your own betray'd?
Hence 't is, my greatest crime has only been
(Not in mine eyes, but yours) in being seen.
P. I hurt to love, but do not love to hurt.
C. That 's worse than making cruelty a sport.
P. Pain is the foil of pleasure and delight,
That sets it off to a more noble height.
C. He buys his pleasure at a rate too vain,
That takes it up beforehand of his pain.
P. Pain is more dear than pleasure when 't is past.
C. But grows intolerable if it last,» etc.

age of Lope de Vega.[1] The English heroic poet did enough if he displayed sufficient point in the dialogue, and alertness in adopting and retorting the image presented by the preceding speech; though, if he could twist the speaker's own words into an answer to his argument, it seems to have been held the more ingenious mode of confutation.

While the hero of a rhyming tragedy was thus unboundedly submissive in love, and dexterous in applying the metaphysical logic of amorous jurisprudence, it was essential to his character that he should possess all the irresistible courage and fortune of a *preux chevalier*. Numbers, however unequal, were to be as chaff before the whirlwind of his valour; and nothing was to be so impossible, that, at the command of his mistress, he could not with ease achieve. When, in the various changes of fortune which such tragedies demand, he quarrelled with those whom he had before assisted to conquer,

> «Then to the vanquish'd part his fate he led,
> The vanquish'd triumph'd, and the victor fled.»

The language of such a personage, unless when engaged in argumentative dialogue with his mistress, was, in all respects, as magnificent and inflated as might beseem his irresistible prowess. Witness the famous speech of Almanzor

[1] Life of Lope de Vega, p. 208.

«*Almanz.* To live!
If from thy hands alone my death can be,
I am immortal, and a god to thee.
If I would kill thee now, thy fate's so low,
That I must stoop ere I can give the blow:
But mine is fix'd so far above thy crown,
That all thy men,
Piled on thy back, can never pull it down:
But, at my ease, thy destiny I send,
By ceasing from this hour to be thy friend.
Like heaven, I need but only to stand still,
And, not concurring to thy life, I kill.
Thou canst no title to my duty bring;
I 'm not thy subject, and my soul 's thy king.
Farewell. When I am gone,
There 's not a star of thine dare stay with thee:
I 'll whistle thy tame fortune after me;
And whirl fate with me wheresoe'er I fly,
As winds drive storms before them in the sky.»

It was expected by the audience, that the pomp of scenery, and bustle of action, in which such tremendous heroes were engaged, should in some degree correspond with their lofty sentiments and super-human valour. Hence solemn feasts, processions, and battles by sea and land, filled the theatre. Hence, also, the sudden and violent changes of fortune, by which the hero and his antogonists are agitated through the whole piece. Fortune has been often compared to the sea; but in a heroic play, her course resembled an absolute Bay of Biscay, or Race of Portland, disturbed by an hundred contending currents and eddies, and

never continuing a moment in one steady flow.

That no engine of romantic surprise might be wanting, Dryden contends, that the dramatist, as he is not confined to the probable in character, so he is not limited by the bounds of nature in the action, but may let himself loose to visionary objects, and to the representation of such things as, not depending upon sense, leave free exercise for the imagination. Indeed, if ghosts, magicians, and demons, might with propriety claim a place any where, it must be in plays which throughout disclaim the common rules of nature, both in the incidents narrated, and the agents interested. [1]

Lastly, the action of the heroic drama was to be laid, not merely in the higher, but in the very highest walk of life. No one could with decorum aspire to share the sublimities which it annexed to character, except those made of the «porcelain clay of the earth,» dukes, princes, kings, and kaisars. The matters agitated must

[1] Dryden was severely censured by the critics for his supernatural persons, and ironically described as the «man nature seemed to make choice of to enlarge the poet's empire, and to complete those discoveries others had begun to shadow. That Shakspeare and Fletcher (as some think) erected the pillars of poetry, is a gross errour; this Zany of Columbus has discovered a poeticall world of greater extent than the naturall, peopled with Atlantick colonies of notionall creatures, astrall spirits, ghosts, and idols, more various than ever the Indians worshipt, and heroes more lawless than their savages.»—*Censure of the Rota.*

be of moment, proportioned to their characters and elevated station, the fate of cities and the fall of kingdoms.

That the language, as well as actions and character of the *dramatis personæ*, might be raised above the vulgar, their sentiments were delivered in rhyme, the richest and most ornate kind of verse, and the farthest removed from ordinary colloquial diction. Dryden has himself assigned the following reasons :—« The plot, the characters, the wit, the passions, the descriptions, are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them, with proportion to verisimility. Tragedy, we know, is wont to image to us the minds and fortunes of noble persons, and to pourtray these exactly; heroic rhyme is nearest nature, as being the noblest kind of modern verse.

Indignatur enim privatis, et prope socco
Dignis carminibus, narrari cœna Thyestæ—

says Horace : and in another place,

Effutire leves indigna tragœdia versus.—

Blank verse is acknowledged to be too low for a poem, nay more, for a paper of verses; but if too low for an ordinary sonnet, how much more for tragedy, which is by Aristotle, in the dispute betwixt the epic poesy and the dramatic, for many reasons he there alleges, ranked above it.»

When we consider these various essentials of a rhyming play, we may perhaps, without impropriety, define it to be a metrical romance of chivalry in form of a drama. The hero is a perfect knight-errant, invincible in battle, and devoted to his dulcinea by a love, subtle, metaphysical, and abstracted from all the usual qualities of the instinctive passion; his adventures diversified by splendid descriptions of bull-feasts, battles, and tournaments; his fortune undergoing the strangest, most causeless, and most unexpected varieties; his history chequered by the marvellous interference of ghosts, spectres, and hell itself; his actions effecting the change of empires, and his coagents being all lords, and dukes, and noble princes, in order that their rank might, in some slight degree, correspond to the native exaltation of the champion's character.

The reader may smile at this description, and feel some surprise how compositions, involving such gross absurdities, were tolerated by an audience, having pretence to taste and civilization. But something may be said for the heroic drama.

Although the manners were preposterous, and the changes of fortune rapid and improbable, yet the former often attained a sublime, though forced elevation of sentiment; and the latter, by rapidity of transition and of contrast, served in no slight degree to interest as well as

to surprise the audience. If the spectators were occasionally stunned with bombast, or hurried and confused by the accumulation of action and intrigue, they escaped the languor of a creeping dialogue, and the tedium of a barren plot, of which the termination is descried full three acts before it can be attained. Besides, if these dramas were sometimes extravagant, beautiful passages often occurred to atone for these sallies of fury. In others, ingenuity makes some amends for the absence of natural feeling, and the reader's fancy is pleased at the expense of his taste. In representation, the beauty of the verse, assisted by the enunciation of such actors as Betterton and Mohun, gilded over the defects of the sense, and afforded a separate gratification. The splendour of scenery also, in which these plays claimed a peculiar excellence, afforded a different but certain road to popular favour; and thus this drama, with all its faults, was very far from wanting the usual requisites for success. But another reason for its general popularity may be sought in a certain correspondence with the manners of the time.

Although in Charles the Second's reign the age of chivalry was totally at an end, yet the sentiments, which had ceased to be motives of action, were not so obsolete as to sound totally strange to the public ear. The French romances of the lower class, such as « Cassandra, »

«Cleopatra,» etc., were the favourite pastime of the ladies, and retained all the extravagancies of chivalrous sentiment, with a double portion of tedious form and metaphysical subtlety. There were occasionally individuals romantic enough to manage their correspondence and amours on this exploded system. The admired Mrs Philips carried on an extensive correspondence with ingenious persons of both sexes, in which she called herself *Orinda*, and her husband, Mr Wogan, by the title of *Antenor*. Shadwell, an acute observer of nature, in one of his comedies, describes a formal coxcomb of this class, who courts his mistress out of the «Grand Cyrus,» and rejoices in an opportunity of showing, that his passion could subsist in despite of her scorn.[1] It is probable he had met with such an original in the course of his observation. The *Précieuses* of Moliere, who affected a strange mixture of the romantic heroine and modern fine lady, belong to the same

[1] His mistress having fallen in love with a disguised barber, a less polished rival exclaims,—

«*Sir Hum.* Nay, for my part, madam, if you must love a cudgelled barber, and take him for a valiant count, make much of him; I shall desist: there are more ladies, Heaven be thanked.

Trim. Yes, sir, there are more ladies; but if any man affirms that my fair Dorinda has an equal, I thus fling down my glove, and do demand the combat for her honour.—This is a nice point of honour I have hit.»—*Bury fair.*

class of oddities, and had their prototypes under the observation of the satirist. But even those who were above such foppery had been early taught to read and admire the conceits of Donne, and the metaphysical love-poems of Cowley. They could not object to the quaint and argumentative dialogues which we have described; for the course of their studies had formed their taste upon a model equally artificial and fantastic: and thus, what between real excellence and false brilliancy, the age had been accustomed not only to admit, but to admire, heroic plays.

Perhaps even these favourable circumstances of taste and opportunity would hardly have elevated the rhyming drama so high in the public opinion, had it been supported by less powers than those of Dryden, or even by equal talents less happily adapted to that style of composition. His versification flowed so easily, as to lessen the bad effects of rhyme in dialogue; and, at the same time, abounded with such splendid and sonorous passages, as, in the mouth of a Betterton, awed into silence even those critics, who could distinguish that the tumid and unnatural was sometimes substituted for the heroic and sublime. The felicity of his language, the richness of his illustrations, and the depth of his reflections, often supplied what the scene wanted in natural passion; and, while enjoying the beauty of his declamation,

it was only on cool reflection, that the hearer discovered it had passed upon him for the expression of genuine feeling. Even then, the pleasure which he actually received from the representation was accepted as an apology for the more legitimate delight, which the rules of criticism entitled him to have expected. To these considerations, the high rank and consequent influence, which Dryden already held in the fashionable and literary circles of the time, must unquestionably be added. Nor did he fail to avail himself of his access to the great, whose applause was often cheaply secured by a perusal of the piece, previous to its being presented to the public; and thus it afterwards came forth with all the support of a party eminent for rank and literature, already prepossessed in its favour.[1]

For all these reasons, the heroic drama appears to have gradually risen in reputation, from the return of Charles till about the year 1670-1, when Dryden's «Conquest of Gra-

[1] The author of the «Friendly Vindication of Mr Dryden from the Censure of the Rota» (Cambridge, 1673,) mentions, «his humble and supplicant addresses to men and ladies of honour, to whom he presented the most of his plays to be read, and so passing through their families, to comply with their censures before-hand; confessing ingenuously, that had he ventured his wits upon the tenter-hooks of Fortune (like other poets who depended more upon the merits of their pens), he had been more severely entangled in his own lines long ago.»—Page 7.

nada» was received with such enthusiastic applause. The reputation of the poet himself kept pace with that of his favourite style of composition; and, though posterity has judged more correctly, it may be questioned, whether «Tyrannic Love» and the «Conquest of Granada» did not place Dryden higher in public esteem, in 1670, than his «Virgil» and «Fables» in 1700. He was, however, now to experience the inconveniencies of elevation, and to sustain an attack upon the style of writing which he had vindicated and practised, as well as to repel the efforts of rivals, who boasted of outstripping him in the very road to distinction which he had himself pointed out. The Duke of Buckingham attacked the system of rhyming plays from the foundation; Leigh, Clifford, and other scribblers, wrote criticisms upon those of our author in particular; and Elkanah Settle was able to form a faction heretical enough to maintain, that he could write such compositions better than Dryden.

The witty farce of the «Rehearsal» is said to have been meditated by its authors (for it was the work of several hands), so early as a year or two after the Restoration, when Sir William D'Avenant's operas and tragedies were the favourite exhibitions. The ostensible author was the witty George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, whose dissipation was marked with shades of the darkest profligacy. He lived an

unprincipled statesman, a fickle projector, a wavering friend, a steady enemy; and died a bankrupt, an outcast, and a proverb. The duke was unequal to that masculine satire, which depends for edge and vigour upon the conception and expression of the author.[1] But he appears to have possessed considerable powers of discerning what was ludicrous; and enough of subordinate humour to achieve an imitation of colloquial peculiarities, or a parody upon remarkable passages of poetry,—talents differing as widely from real wit, as mimicry does from true comic action. Besides, Buckingham, as a man of fashion and a courtier, was master of the *persiflage*, or jargon of the day, so essentially useful as the medium of conveying light humour. He early distinguished himself as on opponent of the rhyming plays. Those of the Howards, of D'Avenant, and others, the first which appeared after the Reformation, experienced his opposition. At the representation of the «United Kingdoms,» by the Honourable Edward Howard, a brother of Sir Robert, the duke's active share in damning the piece was so far resented by the author and his friends, that he narrowly escaped sanguinary proofs of their displeasure.[2] This spe-

[1] Of this want of talent the reader may find sufficient proof in the extracts from his Grace's reflections upon «Absalom and Achitophel.»

[2] See «Key to the Rehearsal.» «Our most noble author,

cimen of irritation did not prevent his meditating an attack upon the whole body of modern dramatists; in which he had the assistance of several wits, who either respected the ancient drama, or condemned the modern style, or were willing to make common cause with a duke against a poet-laureat. These were, the witty author of Hudibras, who, while himself starving, amused his misery by ridiculing his contemporaries; Sprat, afterwards Bishop of Rochester, then Buckingham's chaplain; and Martin Clifford, afterwards Master of the Chapter-House, the author of a very scurrilous criticism upon some of Dryden's plays, to be

to manifest his just indignation and hatred of this fulsome new way of writing, used his utmost interest and endeavours to stifle it at its first appearance on the stage, by engaging all his friends to explode and run down these plays; especially the 'United Kingdoms,' which had like to have brought his life into danger.

«The author of it being nobly born, of an ancient and numerous family, had many of his relations and friends in the cockpit during the acting of it. Some of them perceiving his Grace to head a party, who were very active in damning the play, by hissing and laughing immoderately at the strange conduct thereof, there were persons laid wait for him as he came out; but there being a great tumult and uproar in the house and the passages near it, he escaped; but he was threatened hard. However, the business was composed in a short time, though by what means I have not been informed.» The trade of criticism was not uniformly safe in those days. In the Preface to the «Reformation,» a beau is only directed to venture to abuse a new play, *if he knows the author is no fighter.*

mentioned hereafter. By the joint efforts of this coalition, the « Rehearsal» was produced; a lively piece, which continues to please, although the plays which it parodies are no longer read or acted, and although the zest of the personal satire which it contains has evaporated in the lapse of time. This attack on the reigning taste was long threatened ere it was made; and the precise quarter to be assailed was varied more than once. Prior says, that Buckingham suspended his attack till he was certain that the Earl of Dorset would not « rehearse on him again.» The principal character was termed, in the original sketch, Bilboa, a name expressing a traveller and soldier, under which Sir Robert Howard, or Sir William D'Avenant, was designated. The author of the « Key to the Rehearsal» affirms, that Sir Robert was the person meant; but Mr Malone is of opinion, that D'Avenant is clearly pointed out by the brown paper patch introduced in ridicule of that which D'Avenant really wore upon his nose. Yet as this circumstance was retained when the character was assigned to Dryden, the poet of the « Rehearsal» may be considered as in some degree a knight of the shires, representing all the authors of the day, and uniting in his person their several absurd peculiarities. The first sketch of the « Rehearsal» was written about 1664, but the representation was prevented by the theatres being shut upon

the plague and fire of London. When they were again opened, the plays of the Howards, of Stapleton, etc. had fallen into contempt by their own demerit, and were no longer a well-known or worthy object of ridicule. Perhaps also there was a difficulty in bringing the piece forward, while, of the persons against whom its satire was chiefly directed, D'Avenant was manager of the one theatre, and Dryden a sharer in the other. The death of D'Avenant probably removed this difficulty: and the success of Dryden in the heroic drama; the boldness with which he stood forth, not only as a practiser, but as the champion of that peculiar style; a certain provoking tone of superiority in his critical essays, which, even when flowing from conscious merit, is not easily tolerated by contemporaries; and perhaps his situation as poet-laureat, a post which has been always considered as a fair butt for the shafts of ridicule,—induced Buckingham to resume the plan of his satire, and to place Dryden in the situation designed originally for D'Avenant or Howard. That the public might be at no loss to assign the character of Bayes to the laureat, his peculiarities of language were strictly copied. Lacy the actor was instructed by Buckingham himself how to mimic his voice and manner; and, in performing the part, he wore a dress exactly resembling Dryden's usual habit. With these ill-natured precautions, the

« Rehearsal» was, in 1671, brought forward for the first time by the King's Company. As, besides the reputation of Dryden, that of many inferior poets, but greater men, was assailed by the duke's satire, it would appear that the play met a stormy reception on the first night of representation. The friends of the Earl of Orrery, of Sir Robert Howard and his brothers, and other men of rank, who had produced heroic plays, were loud and furious in their opposition. But, as usually happens, the party who laughed got the advantage over that which was angry, and finally drew the audience to their side. When once received, the success of the « Rehearsal» was unbounded. The very popularity of the plays ridiculed aided the effect of the satire, since every body had in their recollection the originals of the passages parodied. Besides the attraction of personal severity upon living and distinguished literary characters, and the broad humour of the burlesque, the part of Bayes had a claim to superior praise, as drawn with admirable attention to the foibles of the poetic tribe. His greedy appetite for applause; his testy repulse of censure or criticism; his inordinate and overwhelming vanity, not unmixed with a vein of flattery to those who he hopes will gratify him by returning it in kind; finally, that extreme, anxious, and fidgetting attention to the minute

parts of what even in whole is scarce worthy of any,—are, I fear, but too appropriate qualities of the «*genus vatum.*»

Almost all Dryden's plays, including those on which he set the highest value, and which he had produced, with confidence, as models of their kind, were parodied in the «Rehearsal.» He alone contributed more to the farce than all the other poets together. His favourite style of comic dialogue, which he had declared to consist rather in a quick sharpness of dialogue than in delineations of humour,[1] is paraphrased in the scene between Tom Thimble and Prince Prettyman; the lyrics of his astral spirits are cruelly burlesqued in the song of the two lawful Kings of Brentford, as they descend to repossess their throne; above all, Almanzor, his favourite hero, is parodied in the magnanimous Drawcansir; and to conclude, the whole scope of heroic plays, with their combats, feasts, processions, sudden changes of fortune, embarrassments of chivalrous love and honour, splendid verse and unnatural rants, are so held up to ridicule, as usually to fix the resemblance upon some one of his own dramas. The «Wild Gallant,» the «Maiden Queen,» and «Tyrannic Love,» all furnish parodies, as do both parts of the «Conquest of Granada,» which had been frequently acted before the representation of

[1] Preface to «An Evening's Love.»

the «Rehearsal,» though not printed till after. What seems more strange, the play of «Marriage à la Mode» is also alluded to, although it was neither acted nor printed till 1673, a year after the appearance of the «Rehearsal.» But there being no parody of any particular passage, although the plot and conduct of the piece are certainly ridiculed, it seems probable that, as Dryden often showed his plays in manuscript to those whom he accounted his patrons, the plan of «Marriage à la Mode» may have transpired in the circles which Buckingham frequented, who may thus have made it the subject of satire by anticipation. [1]

It is easy to conceive what Dryden must have felt, at beholding his labours, and even his person, held up to public derision, on the

[1] Mr Malone inclines to think, there is no allusion to «Marriage à la Mode» in the «Rehearsal.» But surely the whimsical distress of Prince Prettyman, «sometimes a fisher's son, sometimes a prince,» is precisely that of Leonidas, who is first introduced as the son of a shepherd; secondly, discovered to be the son of an unlawful king called Polydamus; thirdly, proved anew to be the son of the shepherd; and, finally, proved to be the son of neither of them, but of the lawful king, Theogenes. Besides, the author of the «Key to the Rehearsal» points out a parallel between the revolution of state in the farce, and that by which Leonidas, after being carried off to execution, on a sudden snatches a sword from one of the guards, proclaims himself rightful king, and, without more ceremony, deposes the powerful and jealous usurper, who had sentenced him to death.

theatre where he had so often triumphed. But he was too prudent to show outward signs of resentment; and in conversation allowed, that the farce had a great many good things in it, though so severe against himself. «Yet I cannot help saying,» he added, in a well-judged tone of contempt, «that Smith and Johnson are two of the coollest and most insignificant fellows I ever met with upon the stage.[1] Many years afterwards he assigned nearly the same reason to the public for not replying to the satire.[2] But though he veiled his resentment under this mask of indifference at the time, he afterwards avowed, that the exquisite character of Zimri in «Absalom and Achitophel» was laboured with so much felicitous skill as a requital in kind to the author of the «Rehearsal.»[3]

[1] Spence's «Anecdotes,» quoted by Mr Malone.

[2] «I answered not the 'Rehearsal,' because I knew the author sat to himself when he drew the picture, and was the very Bayes of his own farce; because also I knew that my betters were more concerned than I was in that satire; and, lastly, because Mr Smith and Mr Johnson, the main pillars of it, were two such languishing gentlemen in their conversation, that I could liken them to nothing but to their own relations, those noble characters of men of wit and pleasure about the town.»—*Dedication to Juvenal*, vol. XIII. p. 10.

[3] The pains which Dryden bestowed on the character of Zimri, and the esteem in which he held it, is evident from his quoting it as the master-piece of his own satire. «The character of Zimri in my 'Absalom' is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem: it is not bloody, but it is ri-

The ridicule cast upon heroic plays by the «Rehearsal,» did not prevent their being still exhibited. They contained many passages of splendid poetry, which continued to delight the audience after they had laughed at Buckingham's parody. But the charm began to dissolve; and from the time of that representation, they seem gradually, but perceptibly, to have declined in favour. Accordingly, Dryden did not trust to his powers of numbers in his next play, but produced the Marriage à la Mode,» a tragi-comedy, or rather a tragedy and comedy, the plots and scenes of which are intermingled, for they have no natural connexion with each other. The state-intrigue bears evident marks of hurry and inattention; and it is at least possible, that Dryden originally intended it for the subject of a proper heroic play, but startled at the effect of Buckingham's satire, hastily added to it some comic scenes, either lying by him, or composed on purpose. The higher or tragic plot is not only grossly inartificial and improbable, but its incidents are

diculous enough; and he, for whom it was intended, was too witty to resent it as an injury. If I had railed, I might have suffered for it justly; but I managed my own work more happily, perhaps more dexterously. I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blind sides, and little extravagancies; to which, the wittier a man is, he is generally the more obnoxious. It succeeded as I wished; the jest went round, and he was laughed at in his turn who began the frolic.»

so perplexed and obscure, that it would have required much more action to detail them intelligibly. Even the language has an abridged appearance, and favours the idea, that the tragic intrigue was to have been extended into a proper heroic play, instead of occupying a spare corner in a comedy. But to make amends, the comic scenes are executed with spirit, and in a style resembling those in the «Maiden Queen.»[1] They contained much witty and fashionable raillery; and the character of Melantha is pronounced by Cibber to exhibit the most complete system of female foppery that could possibly be crowded into the tortured form of a fine lady. It was admirably acted by Mrs Montfort, afterwards Mrs Verbruggen. The piece thus supported was eminently successful; a fortunate circumstance for the King's Company, who were then in distressful circumstances. Their house in Drury-Lane had been destroyed by fire, after which disaster they were compelled to occupy the old theatre in Lincoln's-inn Fields, lately deserted by the rival company for a splendid one in Dorset Gardens. From a prologue which our author furnished, to be spoken at the opening of this house of refuge, it would seem, that even the scenes and properties of the actors had been

[1] In one of Cibber's moods of alteration, he combined the comic scenes of these two plays into a comedy entitled «The Comical Lovers.»

furnished by the contributions of the nobility.[1] Perhaps their present reduced situation was an additional reason with Dryden for turning his attention to comedy, which required less splendour of exhibition and decoration than the heroic plays.

«Marriage à la Mode» was inscribed to Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, in strains of adulation not very honourable to the dedicator. But as he expresses his gratitude for Rochester's care, not only of his reputation, but of his fortune; for his solicitude to overcome the fatal modesty of poets, which leads them to prefer want to importunity; and, finally, for the good effects of his mediation in all his concerns at court; it may be supposed some recent benefit, perhaps an active share in procuring the appointment of poet-laureat, had warmed the heart of the author towards the patron. The dedication was well received, and the compliment handsomely acknowledged, as we learn by a letter from Dryden to Rochester, where he says, that the shame of being so much overpaid for an ill dedication made him almost repent of his address. But he had

[1] «You are changed too, and your pretence to see
Is but a nobler name for charity;
Your own provisions furnish out our feasts,
While you, the founders, make yourselves the guests.»

shortly afterwards rather more substantial reasons for regretting his choice of a patron.

The same cause for abstaining from tragic composition still remaining in force, Dryden, in 1672, brought forward a comedy, called, «The Assignation, or Love in a Nunnery.» The plot was after the Spanish model. The author seems to have apprehended, and experienced, some opposition, on account of this second name; and although he deprecates, in the epilogue, the idea of its being a party play, or written to gratify the puritans with satire at the expence of the catholics,[1] yet he complains, in the dedication, of the number of its enemies, who came prepared to damn it on account of the title. The Duke of York having just made public profession of the Roman faith, any reflections

[1] «Some have expected, from our bills to-day,
To find a satire in our poet's play.
The zealous rout from Coleman-street did run,
To see the story of the Friar and Nun;
Or tales, yet more ridiculous to hear,
Vouch'd by their vicar of ten pounds a-year,—
Of Nuns, who did against temptation pray,
And discipline laid on the pleasant way:
Or that, to please the malice of the town,
Our poet should in some close cell have shown
Some sister, playing at content alone:
This they did hope; the other side did fear;
And both, you see, alike are cozen'd here.»

upon it were doubtless watched with a jealous eye. But, though guiltless in this respect, the «Assignation» had worse faults. The plot is but indifferently conducted, and was neither enlivened with gay dialogue, nor with striking character: the play, accordingly, proved unsuccessful in the representation. Yet although, upon reading the «Assignation,» we cannot greatly wonder at this failure, still, considering the plays which succeeded about the same time, we may be disposed to admit, that the weight of a party was thrown into the scale against its reception. Buckingham, who shortly afterwards published a revised edition of the «Rehearsal,» failed not to ridicule the absurd and coarse trick, by which the enamoured prince prevents his father from discovering the domino of his mistress, which had been left in his apartment.[1] And Dry-

[1] «*Bayes.* I remember once, in a play of mine, I set off a scene, i'gad, beyond expectation, only with a petticoat and the belly-ache.

Smith. Pray, how was that, sir?

Bayes. Why, sir, I contrived a petticoat to be brought in upon a chair (nobody knew how), into a prince's chamber, whose father was not to see it, that came in by chance.

Johns. God's-my-life, that was a notable contrivance indeed!

Smith. Ay, but, Mr Bayes, how could you contrive the belly-ache?

den's rivals and enemies, now a numerous body, hailed, with malicious glee, an event, which seemed to foretel the decay of his popularity.

The «Assignation» was published in 1673, and inscribed, by Dryden, to his much honoured friend Sir Charles Sedley. There are some acrimonious passages in this dedication, referring to the controversies in which the author had been engaged; and, obscure as these have become, it is the biographer's duty to detail and illustrate them.

It cannot be supposed, that the authors of the time saw with indifference Dryden's rapid success, and the measures which he had taken, by his critical essays, to guide the public attention, and to fix it upon himself and the heroic plays, in which he felt his full superiority. But no writer of the time could hope to be listened to by the public, if he entered a claim of personal competition against a poet so celebrated. The defence of the ancient poets afforded a less presumptuous and more favourable pretext for taking the field, and for assailing Dry-

Bayes. The easiest i'the world, i'gad: I'll tell you how. I made the prince sit down upon the petticoat, no more than so, and pretended to his father that he had just then got the belly-ache; whereupon his father went out to call a physician, and his man ran away with the petticoat.» —*Rehearsal.*

den's writings, and avenging the slight notice he had accorded to his contemporaries, under the colour of defending the ancients against his criticism. The «Essay of dramatic poesy» afforded a pretence for commencing this sort of warfare. In that piece, Dryden had pointed out the faults of Shakspeare, Jonson, and Fletcher, with less ceremony than the height of their established reputation appeared to demand from a young author. But the precedence which he undauntedly claimed for the heroic drama, and, more generally, the superiority of the plays of Dryden's own age, whether tragic or comic, over those of the earlier part of the seventeenth century, was asserted, not only distinctly, but irreverently, in the Epilogue to the «Conquest of Granada:»

«They, who have best succeeded on the stage,
Have still conform'd their genius to their age.
Thus Jonson did mechanic humour show,
When men were dull, and conversation low.
Then comedy was faultless, but 't was coarse:
Cobb's tankard was a jest, and Otter's horse.
And, as their comedy, their love was mean;
Except, by chance, in some one labour'd scene,
Which must atone for an ill-written play,
They rose, but at their height could seldom stay.
Fame then was cheap, and the first comer sped;
And they have kept it since, by being dead.
But, were they now to write, when critics weigh
Each line, and every word, throughout a play,

None of them, no not Jonson in his height,
Could pass, without allowing grains for weight.
Think it not envy, that these truths are told;
Our poet's not malicious, though he's bold.
'T is not to brand them, that their faults are shown,
But, by their errors, to excuse his own.
If love and honour now are higher raised,
'Tis not the poet, but the age is praised.
Wit 's now arrived to a more high degree;
Our native language more refined and free.
Our ladies and our men now speak more wit
In conversation, than those poets writ.
Then one of these is, consequently, true;
That what this poet writes comes short of you,
And imitates you ill (which most he fears),
Or else his writing is not worse than theirs.
Yet, though you judge (as sure the critics will),
That some before him writ with greater skill,
In this one praise he has their fame surpast,
To please an age more gallant than the last.»

The daring doctrine laid down in these obnoxious lines, our author ventured to maintain, in what he has termed a «Defence of the Epilogue, or an Essay on the dramatic poetry of the last age.» It is subjoined to the «Conquest of Granada;» and, as that play was not printed till after the «Rehearsal,» it serves to show how little Dryden's opinions were altered, or his tone lowered, by the success of that witty satire. It was necessary, he says, either not to print the bold epilogue, which we have quoted, or to show that he could defend

it. He censures decidedly the antiquated language, irregular plots, and anachronisms of Shakspeare and Fletcher; but his main strength seems directed against Jonson. From his works he selects several instances of harsh, inelegant, and even inaccurate diction. In describing manners, he claims for the modern writers a decided superiority over the poets of the earlier age, when there was less gallantry, and when the authors were not admitted to the best society. The manners of their low, or Dutch school of comedy, in which Jonson led the way, by his «Bartholomew Fair,» and similar pieces, are noticed, and censured, as unfit for a polished audience. The characters in what may be termed genteel comedy are reviewed, and restricted to the Truewit of Jonson's «Silent Woman,» the Mercutio of Shakspeare, and Fletcher's Don John in the «Chances.» Even this last celebrated character, he observes, is better carried on in the modern alteration of the play, than in Fletcher's original; a singular instance of Dryden's liberality of criticism, since the alteration of the «Chances» was made by that very Duke of Buckingham, from whom he had just received a bitter and personal offence. Dryden proceeds to contend, that the living poets, from the example of a gallant king and sprightly court, have learned, in their

comedies, a tone of light discourse and raillery, in which the solidity of English sense is blended with the air and gaiety of their French neighbours; in short, that those who call Jonson's the golden age of poetry, have only this reason, that the audience were then content with acorns, because they knew not the use of bread. In all this criticism there was much undeniable truth; but sufficient weight was not given to the excellencies of the old school, while their faults were ostentatiously and invidiously enumerated. It would seem that Dryden, perhaps from the rigour of a puritanical education, had not studied the ancient dramatic models in his youth, and had only begun to read them with attention when it was his object rather to depreciate than to emulate them. But the time came when he did due homage to their genius.

Meanwhile, this avowed preference of his own period excited the resentment of the older critics, who had looked up to the era of Shakspeare as the golden age of poetry; and no less that of the play-wrights of his own standing, who pretended to discover, that Dryden designed to establish less the reputation of his age, than of himself individually, upon the ruined fame of the ancient poets. They complained that, as the wild bull in the Vivarambla of Granada,

—— « Monarch-like he ranged the listed field,
And some he trampled down, and some he kill'd. »

Many, therefore, advancing under pretence of vindicating the fame of the ancients, gratified their spleen by attacking that of Dryden, and strove less to combat his criticisms, than to criticise his productions. We shall have too frequent occasion to observe, that there was, during the reign of Charles II., a semi-barbarous virulence of controversy, even upon abstract points of literature, which would be now thought injudicious and unfair, even by the newspaper advocates of contending factions. A critic of that time never deemed he had so effectually refuted the reasoning of his adversary, as when he had said something disrespectful of his talents, person, or moral character. Thus, literary contest was embittered by personal hatred, and truth was so far from being the object of the combatants, that even victory was tasteless unless obtained by the disgrace and degradation of the antagonist. This reflection may serve to introduce a short detail of the abusive controversies in which it was Dryden's lot to be engaged.

One of those who most fiercely attacked our author's system and opinions was Matthew Clifford, already mentioned as engaged in the « Rehearsal. » At what precise time

he began his Notes upon Dryden's Poems, in Four Letters, or how they were originally published, is uncertain. The last of the letters is dated from the Charter-House, 1st July, 1672, and is signed with his name: probably the others were written shortly before. The only edition now known was printed along with some « Reflections on the Hind and Panther, by another Hand » (Tom Brown), in 1687. If these letters were not actually printed in 1672, they were probably successively made public by transcripts handed about in the coffee-houses, which was then the usual mode of circulating lampoons and pieces of satire. Although Clifford was esteemed a man of wit and a scholar, his style is rude, coarse, and ungentlemanlike, and the criticism is chiefly verbal. In the note the reader may peruse an ample specimen of the kind of wit, or rather banter, employed by this facetious person.[1] The

[1] «To begin with your character of Almanzor, which you avow to have taken from the Achilles in Homer; pray hear what Famianus Strada says of such talkers as Mr Dryden: *Ridere soleo, cum video homines ab Homeri virtutibus strenuè declinantes, si quid vero irrepsit vitii, id avidè arripientes.* But I might have spared this quotation, and you your avowing; for this character might as well have been borrowed from some of the stalls in Bedlam, or any of your own hair-brained coxcombs, which you call heroes, and persons of honour. I remember just such another fuming Achilles in Shakspeare, one Ancient Pistol,

letters were written successively, at different periods; for Clifford, in the last, complains, that he cannot extort an answer; and there-

whom he avows to be a man of so fiery a temper, and so impatient of an injury, even from Sir John Falstaff, his captain and a knight, that he not only disobeyed his commands about carrying a letter to Mrs Page, but returned him an answer as full of contumely, and in as opprobrious terms, as he could imagine:

'Let vultures gripe thy guts, for gourd and Fullam holds,
And high and low beguiles the rich and poor.
Tester I 'll have in pouch, when thou shalt lack,
Base Phrygian Turk,' etc.

«Let's see e'er an Abencerrago fly a higher pitch. Take him at another turn, quarrelling with Corporal Nym, an old Zegri: The difference arose about mine hostess Quickly, (for I would not give a rush for a man unless he be particular in matters of this moment); they both aimed at her body, but Abencerrago Pistol defies his rival in these words:

'Fetch from the powdering-tub of infamy
That lazar-kite of Cressid's kind,
Doll Tearsheet, she by name, and her espouse: I have, and I will hold,
The quondam Quickly for the only she.
And *pauca*.'

«There's enough. Does not this quotation sound as well as I?

«But the four sons of Ammon, the three bold Beachams, the four London Prentices, Tamerlane, the Scythian Shepherd, Muleasses, Amurath, and Bajazet, or any raging Turk at the Red-bull and Fortune, might as well have been urged by you as a pattern of your Almanzor, as the Achilles in Homer; but then our laureat had not passed for so

fore seems to conceive, that his arguments are unanswerable.

There were several other pamphlets and fugitive pieces published against Dryden at the same time. One of them, entitled «The Censure of the Rota on Mr Dryden's Conquest of Granada,» was printed at Oxford in 1673. This was followed by a similar piece, entitled «A Description of the Academy of Athenian Virtuosi, with a Discourse held there in Vindication of Mr Dryden's Conquest of Granada against the Author of the Censure of the Rota.» And a third, called «A Friendly Vindication of Mr Dryden from the Author of the Censure of the Rota,» was printed at Cambridge. All these appeared previous to the publication of the «Assignation.» The first, as Wood informs us, was written by Richard Leigh, educated

learned a man as he desires his unlearned admirers should esteem him.

«But I am strangely mistaken, if I have not seen this very Almanzor of your's in some disguise about this town, and passing under another name. Prithee tell me true, was not this huff-cap once the Indian Emperor, and, at another time, did not he call himself Maximine? Was not Lyndaraxa once called Almeria, I mean under Montezuma the Indian Emperor? I protest and vow they are either the same, or so alike, that I can't for my heart distinguish one from the other. You are, therefore, a strange unconscionable thief, that art not content to steal from others, but do'st rob thy poor wretched self too.»

at Queen's College, Oxford, where he entered in 1665, and was probably resident when this piece was there published. He was afterwards a player in the Duke's Company, but must be carefully distinguished from the celebrated comedian of the same name. It seems likely that he wrote also the second tract, which is a continuation of the first. Both are in a frothy, flippant style of raillery, of which the reader will find a specimen in the note.[1] The Cam-

[1] «Amongst several other late exercises of the Athenian virtuosi in the Coffee-academy, instituted by Apollo for the advancement of Gazette Philosophy, Mercury's Diurnalli, etc. this day was wholly taken up in the examination of the 'Conquest of Granada.' A gentleman, on the reading of the First Part, and there in the description of the bull-baiting, said, that Almanzor's playing at the bull was according to the standard of the Greek heroes, who, as Mr Dryden had learnedly observed (Essay of Dramatic Poesy), were great beef-eaters. And why might not Almanzor as well as Ajax, or Don Quixote, worry mutton, or take a bull by the throat, since the author had elsewhere explained himself, by telling us the heroes were more noble beasts of prey, in his Epistle to his 'Conquest of Granada,' distinguishing them into wild and tame; and in his play we have Almanzor shaking his chains, and frighting his keeper, broke loose, and tearing those that would reclaim his rage. To this he added, that his bulls excelled other heroes, as far as his own heroes surpassed his gods; that the champion bull was divested of flesh and blood, and made immortal by the poet, and bellowed after death; that the fantastic bull seemed fiercer than the true, and the dead bellowings in verse were louder than the living;

bridge Vindication seems to have been written by a different hand, though in the same taste. It is singular in bringing a charge against our author, which has been urged by no other antagonist; for he is there upbraided with exhibiting in his comedies the persons and follies of living characters.[1]

The friends and admirers of Dryden did not see with indifference these attacks upon his reputation; for he congratulates[2] himself upon having found defenders even among strangers, alluding probably to a tract by

concluding with a wish, that Mr Dryden had the good luck to have varied that old verse quoted in his Dramatic Essay:

« *Atque Ursum, et Pugiles media inter carmina poscunt»*
Tauros, et Pugiles prima inter carmina posco;

and prefixed it to the front of his play, instead of

——« *Major rerum mihi nascitur ordo,*
Majus opus moveo.»

Censure of the Rota, p. 1.

[1] « But, however, if he were taken for no good comic poet, or satirist, he had found a way of much easier license (though more remarkable in the sense of some), which was, not only to libel men's persons, but to represent them on the stage too: That to this purpose he made his observations of men, their words and actions, with so little disguise, that many beheld themselves acted for their half-crown; yet, after all, was unwilling to believe, that this was not both good comedy, and no less good manners.» *Friendly Vindication of Mr Dryden*, p. 8.

[2] Dedication to the «Assignation.»

Mr Charles Blount, entitled, « Mr Dryden Vindicated, in answer to the Friendly Vindication of Mr Dryden, with Reflections on the Rota.» This piece is written with all the honest enthusiasm of youth in defence of that genius which has excited its admiration. In his address to Sedley, Dryden notices these attacks upon him with a supreme degree of contempt.[1] In other respects, the dedication is drawn with the easy

[1] Dryden either confines himself to two pamphlets, or, more probably, speaks of the three as written by only two authors. Leigh is, I presume, the « contemptible pedant,» and the Sir Fastidious Brisk of Oxford. The Cambridge author, who imitated his style, is the Fungoso of the Dedication:—«As for the errors they pretend to find in me, I could easily show them that the greatest part of them are beauties; and for the rest, I could recriminate upon the best poets of our nation, if I could resolve to accuse another of little faults, whom at the same time I admire for greater excellencies. But I have neither concernment enough upon me to write any thing in my own defence, neither will I gratify the ambition of two wretched scribblers, who desire nothing more than to be answered. I have not wanted friends, even amongst strangers, who have defended me more strongly than my contemptible pedant could attack me; for the other, he is only like Fungoso in the play, who follows the fashion at a distance, and adores the Fastidious Brisk of Oxford. You can bear me witness, that I have not consideration enough for either of them to be angry: let Mævius and Bavius admire each other, I wish to be hated by them and their fellows, by the same reason for which I desire to be loved by you.»—*Dedication to the Assignation.*

indifference of one accustomed to the best society, towards the authority of those who presumed to judge of modern manners, without having access to see those of the higher circles. The picture which it draws of the elegance of the convivial parties of the wits in that gay time, has been quoted a few pages higher.

I know not if it be here worth while to mention a petty warfare between Dryden and Edward Ravenscroft,[1] an unworthy scribbler, who wrote plays, or rather altered those of Shakspeare, and imitated those of Moliere. This person, whether from a feud which naturally subsisted between the two rival theatres, or from envy and dislike to Dryden personally, chose, in the Prologue to the «Citizen turned Gentleman,» acted at the Duke's house in 1672, to level some sneers at the heroic drama, which affected particularly the «Conquest of Granada,» then act-

[1] A student of law in the Temple, and author of that notable alteration of «Titus Andronicus» mentioned in the commentaries on Shakspeare. Besides the «Citizen turned Gentleman,» he wrote the «Careless Lovers,» «Scaramouch, a Philosopher,» the «Wrangling Lovers,» «Edgar and Alfreda,» the «English Lawyer,» the «London Cuckolds,» distinguished by Cibber as the grossest play that ever succeeded, «Dame Dobson,» the said alteration of «Titus Andronicus,» the «Canterbury Guests,» and the «Italian Husband,»—in all twelve plays, not one of which has the least merit.

ing with great applause. Ravenscroft's play, which is a bad translation from the «*Bourgeois Gentilhomme*» of Moliere, was successful, chiefly owing to the burlesque procession of Turks employed to dub the Citizen a *Mamamouchi*, or Paladin. Dryden, with more indignation than the occasion warranted, retorted, in the Prologue to the «Assignation,» by the following attack on Ravenscroft's jargon and buffoonery :

«You must have Mamamouchi, such a fop
As would appear a monster in a shop;
He 'll fill your pit and boxes to the brim,
Where, ramm'd in crowds, you see yourselves in him.
Sure there 's some spell, our poet never knew,
In *Hullibabilah de*, and *Chu, chu, chu;*
But *Marababah sahem* most did touch you;
That is, Oh how we love the Mamamouchi!
Grimace and habit sent you pleased away;
You damn'd the poet, and cried up the play.»

About this time, too, the actresses in the King's theatre, to vary the amusements of the house, represented «Marriage à la Mode» in men's dresses. The Prologue and Epilogue were furnished by Dryden; and in the latter, mentioning the projected union of the theatres,—

—— «all the women most devoutly swear,
Each would be rather a poor actress here,
Than to be made a Mamamouchi there.»

Ravenscroft, thus satirized, did not fail to

exult in the bad success of the «Assignation,» and celebrated his triumph in some lines of a Prologue to the «Careless Lovers,» which was acted in the vacation succeeding the ill fate of Dryden's play. They are thrown into the note, that the reader may judge how very unworthy this scribbler was of the slightest notice from the pen of Dryden.[1] And with this *Te Deum*, on the part of Ravenscroft, ended a petty controversy, which gives him his only title to be named in the life of an English classic.

From what has been detailed of these disputes we may learn, that, even at this period, the laureat's wreath was not unmingled with thorns; and that if Dryden still maintained his due ascendancy over the common band of authors, it was not without

[1] «An author did, to please you, let his wit run,
Of late much on a serving man and cittern;
And yet, you would not like the serenade,—
Nay, and you damn'd his nuns in masquerade;
You did his Spanish sing-song too abhor;
Ah! que locura con tanto rigor!
In fine, the whole by you so much was blamed,
To act their parts, the players were ashamed.
Ah, how severe your malice was that day!
To damn, at once, the poet and his play:
But why was your rage just at that time shown,
When what the author writ was all his own?
Till then, he borrow'd from romance, and did translate;
And those plays found a more indulgent fate.»

being occasionally under the necessity of descending into the *arena* against very inferior antagonists.

In the course of these controversies, Dryden was not idle, though he cannot be said to have been worthily or fortunately employed; his muse being lent to the court, who were at this time anxious to awake the popular indignation against the Dutch. It is a characteristic of the English nation, that their habitual dislike against their neighbours is soon and easily blown into animosity. But, although Dryden chose for his theme the horrid massacre of Amboyna, and fell to the task with such zeal, that he accomplished it in a month, his play was probably of little service to the cause in which it was written. The story is too disgusting to produce the legitimate feelings of pity and terror, which tragedy should excite: the black-hole of Calcutta would be as pleasing a subject. The character of the Hollanders, as there represented, is too grossly vicious and detestable to give the least pleasure. They are neither men, nor even devils; but a sort of lubbar fiends, compounded of cruelty, avarice, and brutal debauchery, like Dutch swabbers possessed by demons. But of this play the author has himself admitted, that the subject is barren, the persons low, and the writing not heightened by any la-

boured scenes : and, without attempting to contradict this modest description, we may dismiss the tragedy of «Amboyna.» It was dedicated to Lord Clifford of Chudleigh, an active member of the Cabal administration of Charles II.; but who, as a catholic, on the test act being passed, resigned his post of lord high treasurer, and died shortly afterwards. There is great reason to think, that this nobleman had essentially favoured Dryden's views in life. On a former occasion, he had termed Lord Clifford a better Mæcenas than the friend of Horace;[1] and, in the present dedication, he mentions the numerous favours received through so many years, as forming one continued act of his patron's generosity and goodness; so that the excess of his gratitude had led the poet to receive those benefits, as the Jews received their law, with mute wonder, rather than with outward and ceremonious acclamation. These sentiments of obligation he continued, long after Lord Clifford's death, to express in terms

[1] «For my own part, I, who am the least among the poets, have yet the fortune to be honoured with the *best patron*, and the best friend; for (to omit some great persons of our court, to whom I am many ways obliged, and who have taken care of me during the exigencies of a war), I have found a better Mæcenas in the person of my Lord Treasurer Clifford, and a more elegant Tibullus in that of Sir Charles Sidley.»—*Dedication to the Assignation.*

equally glowing;[1] so that we may safely do this statesman's memory the justice to record him as an active and discerning patron of Dryden's genius.

In the course of 1673, our author's pen was engaged in a task, which may be safely condemned as presumptuous, though that pen was Dryden's. It was no other than that of new-modelling the «Paradise Lost» of Milton into a dramatic poem, called the «State of Innocence, or the Fall of Man.» The coldness with which Milton's mighty epic was received upon the first publication is almost proverbial. The character of the author, obnoxious for his share in the usurped government; the turn of the language, so different from that of the age; the seriousness of a subject, so discordant with its lively frivolities—gave to the author's renown the slowness of growth with the permanency of the oak. Milton's merit, however, had not escaped the eye of Dryden.[2] He was ac-

[1] In his Dedication of the Pastorals of Virgil to Hugh Lord Clifford, he says, «I have no reason to complain of fortune, since, in the midst of that abundance, I could not have chosen better than the worthy son of so illustrious a father. He was the patron of my manhood, when I flourished in the opinion of the world, though with small advantage to my fortune, till he awakened the remembrance of my royal master. He was that Pollio, or that Varus, *who introduced me to Augustus.*»

[2] The elder Richardson has told a story, that Lord

quainted with the author, perhaps even before the Restoration; and who can doubt Dryden's power of feeling the sublimity of the «Paradise Lost,» even had he himself not assured us, in the prefatory essay to his own piece, that he accounts it «undoubtedly, one of the greatest, most noble, and most sublime poems, which either this age or nation has produced?» We are, therefore, to seek for the motive which could have induced him, holding this opinion, «to gild pure gold, and set a perfume on the violet.» Dennis has left a curious record upon this subject:— «Dryden,» he observes, «in his Preface before the 'State of Innocence,' appears to have been the first, those gentlemen excepted whose verses are before Milton's poem, who discovered in so public a manner an extraordinary opinion of Milton's extraordinary merit. And yet Mr Dryden at that time knew not half the extent of his excellence, as more than twenty years afterwards he confessed to me, and is pretty plain from

Buckhurst, afterwards Earl of Dorset, was the first who introduced the «Paradise Lost,» then lying like waste paper in the bookseller's hands, to the notice of Dryden. But this tradition has been justly exploded by Mr Malone.— *Life of Dryden*, vol. I. p. 114. Indeed, it is by no means likely, that Dryden could be a stranger to the very existence of a large poem, written by a man of such political as well as literary eminence, even if he had not happened, as was the case, to be personally known to the author.

his writing the 'State of Innocence.'» Had he known the full extent of Milton's excellence, Dennis thought he would not have ventured on this undertaking, unless he designed to be a foil to him: «but they,» he adds, «who knew Mr Dryden, knew very well, that he was not of a temper to design to be a foil to any one.»[1] We are therefore to conclude, that it was only the hope of excelling his original, admirable as he allowed it to be, which impelled Dryden upon this unprofitable and abortive labour; and we are to examine the improvements which Dryden seemed to meditate, or, in other words, the differences between his taste and that of Milton.

And first we may observe, that the difference in their situations affected their habits of thinking upon poetical subjects. Milton had retired into solitude, if not into obscurity, relieved from every thing like external agency either influencing his choice of a subject, or his mode of treating it; and, in consequence, instead of looking abroad to consult the opinion of his age, he appealed only to the judge which Heaven had implanted within him, when he was endowed with severity of judgment, and profusion of genius. But the taste of Dryden was not so independ-

[1] Dennis's Letters, quoted by Malone.

ent. Placed by his very office at the head of what was fashionable in literature, he had to write for those around him, rather than for posterity; was to support a brilliant reputation in the eye of the world; and is often found boasting of his intimacy with those who led the taste of the age, and frequently quoting the

——— «*tamen me*
Cum magnis vixisse, invita fatebitur usque
Invidia.»———

It followed, that Dryden could not struggle against the tide into which he was launched, and that, although it might be expected from his talents that he should ameliorate the reigning taste, or at least carry those compositions which it approved, to their utmost pitch of perfection, it could not be hoped that he should altogether escape being perverted by it, or should soar so superior to all its prejudices, as at once to admit the supereminent excellence of a poem, which ran counter to these in so many particulars.

The versification of Milton, according to the taste of the times, was ignoble, from its supposed facility. Dryden was, we have seen, so much possessed with this prejudice, as to pronounce blank verse unfit even for a fugitive paper of poetry. Even in his later and riper judgment, he affirms, that, whatever pretext Milton might allege for the use of blank verse,

«his own particular reason is plainly this,—that rhyme was not his talent, he had neither the ease of doing it, nor the graces of it: which is manifest in his «Juvenilia,» or verses written in his youth, where his rhyme is always constrained and forced, and comes hardly from him, at an age when the soul is most pliant, and the passion of love makes almost every man a rhymer, though not a poet.»[1] The want of the dignity of rhyme was therefore, according to his idea, an essential deficiency in the «Paradise Lost.» According to Aubrey, Dryden communicated to Milton his intention of adding this grace to his poem; to which the venerable bard gave a contemptuous consent, in these words: «Ay, you may *tag* my verses if you will.» Perhaps few have read so far into the «State of Innocence» as to discover that Dryden did not use this licence to the uttermost, and that several of the scenes are not tagg'd with rhyme.

Dryden at this period engaged in a research recommended to him by «a noble wit of Scotland,» as he terms Sir George Mackenzie, the issue of which, in his apprehension, pointed out farther room for improving upon the epic of Milton. This was an inquiry into the «turn of words and thoughts» requisite in heroic poetry. These «turns,» according to

[1] Essay on Satire.

the definition and examples which Dryden has given us, differ from the points of wit, and quirks of epigram, common in the metaphysical poets, and consist in a happy, and at the same time a natural recurrence of the same form of expression, melodiously varied. Having failed in his search after these beauties in Cowley, the darling of his youth, «I consulted,» says Dryden, «a greater genius (without offence to the manes of that noble author), I mean—Milton; but as he endeavours every where to express Homer, whose age had not arrived to that fineness, I found in him a true sublimity, lofty thoughts, which were clothed with admirable Grecisms, and ancient words, which he had been digging from the mines of Chaucer and Spenser, and which, with all their rusticity, had somewhat of venerable in them. But I found not there neither that for which I looked.» This judgment Addison has proved to be erroneous, by quoting from Milton the most beautiful example of a turn of words which can be found in English poetry.[1] But Dryden, holding it

[1] «With thee conversing, I forget all time,
All seasons, and their change; all please alike:
Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,
With charm of earliest birds: pleasant the sun,
When first on this delightful land he spreads
His orient beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flower,

for just, conceived, doubtless, that, in his «State of Innocence,» he might exert his skill successfully, by supplying the supposed deficiency, and for relieving those «flats of thought» which he complains of, where Milton, for a hundred lines together, runs on in a «track of Scripture;» but which Dennis more justly ascribes to the humble nature of his subject in those passages. The graces, also, which Dryden ventured to interweave with the lofty theme of Milton, were rather those of Ovid than of Virgil, rather turns of verbal expression than of thought. Such

> Glist'ring with dew: fragrant the fertile earth
> After soft show'rs, and sweet the coming on
> Of grateful evening mild: then, silent night,
> With this her solemn bird, and this fair moon,
> And these the gems of heaven, her starry train:
> But neither breath of morn, when she ascends
> With charm of earliest birds; nor rising sun
> On this delightful land; nor herb, fruit, flower,
> Glist'ring with dew; nor fragrance after show'rs;
> Nor grateful evening mild; nor silent night,
> With this her solemn bird; nor walk by moon;
> Or glittering star-light, without thee is sweet.»

«The variety of images in this passage is infinitely pleasing, and the recapitulation of each particular image, with a little varying of the expression, makes one of the finest turns of words that I have ever seen; which I rather mention, because Mr Dryden has said, in his Preface to Juvenal, that he could meet with no turn of words in Milton.»—*Tatler*, Nos. 114, 115.

is that conceit which met with censure at the time :

> «Seraph and cherub, careless of their charge,
> And wanton, in full ease now live at large;
> Unguarded leave the passes of the sky,
> And all dissolved in hallelujahs lie.»

« I have heard, » said a petulant critic, « of anchovies dissolved in sauce; but never of an angel dissolved in hallelujahs.» But this raillery Dryden rebuffs with a quotation from Virgil :

> «*Invadunt urbem, somno vinoque sepultam.*»

It might have been replied, that Virgil's analogy was familiar and simple, and that of Dryden was far-fetched, and startling by its novelty.

The majesty of Milton's verse is strangely degraded in the following speeches, which precede the rising of Pandemonium. Some of the couplets are utterly flat and bald, and, in others, the balance of point and antithesis is substituted for the simple sublimity of the original :

> «*Moloch.* Changed as we are, we're yet from homage free;
> We have, by hell, at least gain'd liberty:
> That 's worth our fall; thus low though we are driven,
> Better to rule in hell, than serve in heaven.
> *Lucifer.* There spoke the better half of Lucifer!
> *Asmoday.* 'T is fit in frequent senate we confer,

And then determine how to steer our course;
To wage new war by fraud, or open force.
The doom 's now past, submission were in vain.
Moloch. And were it not, such baseness I disdain;
I would not stoop, to purchase all above,
And should contemn a power, whom prayer could move,
As one unworthy to have conquer'd me.
Beelzebub. Moloch, in that all are resolved, like thee.
The means are unproposed; but 't is not fit
Our dark divan in public view should sit;
Or what we plot against the Thunderer,
The ignoble crowd of vulgar devils hear.
Lucifer. A golden palace let be raised on high;
To imitate—No, to outshine the sky!
All mines are ours, and gold above the rest:
Let this be done; and quick as 't was exprest.»

I fancy the reader is now nearly satisfied with Dryden's improvements on Milton. Yet some of his alterations have such peculiar reference to the taste and manners of his age, that I cannot avoid pointing them out. Eve is somewhat of a coquette even in the state of innocence. She exclaims,—

——— «from each tree
The feather'd kind press down to look on me;
The beasts, with up-cast eyes, forsake their shade,
And gaze, as if I were to be obey'd.
Sure, I am somewhat which they wish to be,
And cannot;—I myself am proud of me.»

Upon receiving Adam's addresses, she expresses, rather unreasonably in the circumstances, some apprehensions of his infidelity;

and, upon the whole, she is considerably too knowing for the primitive state. The same may be said of Adam, whose knowledge in school divinity, and use of syllogistic argument, Dryden, though he found it in the original, was under no necessity to have retained.

The « State of Innocence,» as it could not be designed for the stage, seems to have been originally intended as a mere poetical prolusion; for Dryden, who was above affecting such a circumstance, tells us, that it was only made public, because, in consequence of several hundred copies, every one gathering new faults, having been dispersed without his knowledge, it became at length a libel on the author, who was forced to print a correct edition in his own defence. As the incidents and language were ready composed by Milton, we are not surprised when informed, that the composition and revision were completed in a single month. The critics having assailed the poem even before publication, the author has prefixed an « Essay upon Heroic Poetry and Poetic License;» in which he treats chiefly of the use of metaphors, and of the legitimacy of machinery.

The Dedication of the « State of Innocence,» addressed to Mary of Este, Duchess of York, is a singular specimen of what has

been since termed the *celestial* style of inscription. It is a strain of flattery in the language of adoration; and the elevated station of the princess is declared so suited to her excellence, that Providence has only done justice to its own works in placing the most perfect work of heaven where it may be admired by all beholders. Even this flight is surpassed by the following:—« 'Tis true, you are above all mortal wishes; no man desires impossibilities, because they are beyond the reach of nature. To hope to be a god, is folly exalted into madness; but, by the laws of our creation, we are obliged to adore him, and are permitted to love him too at human distance. 'Tis the nature of perfection to be attractive; but the excellency of the object refines the nature of the love. It strikes an impression of awful reverence; 'tis indeed that love which is more properly a zeal than passion. 'Tis the rapture which anchorites find in prayer, when a beam of the divinity shines upon them; that which makes them despise all worldly objects; and yet 'tis all but contemplation. They are seldom visited from above; but a single vision so transports them, that it makes up the happiness of their lives. Mortality cannot bear it often: it finds them in the eagerness and height of their devotion; they are speechless for the time that

it continues, and prostrate and dead when it departs.» Such eulogy was the taste of the days of Charles, when ladies were deified in dedications, and painted as Venus or Diana upon canvass. In our time, the elegance of the language would be scarcely held to counterbalance the absurdity of the compliments.

Lee, the dramatic writer, an excellent poet, though unfortunate in his health and circumstances, evinced his friendship for Dryden, rather than his judgment, by prefixing to the « State of Innocence» a copy of verses, in which he compliments the author with having refined the ore of Milton. Dryden repaid this favour by an epistle, in which he beautifully apologizes for the extravagancies of his friend's poetry, and consoles him for the censure of those cold judges, whose blame became praise when they accused the warmth which they were incapable of feeling.[1]

Having thus brought the account of our author's productions down to 1674, from which period we date a perceptible change in his taste and mode of composition, I have only to add, that his private situation was probably altered to the worse, by the burning of the King's Theatre, and the debts contracted in

[1] See this Epistle. It was prefixed to «Alexander the Great;» a play, the merits and faults of which are both in extreme.

rebuilding it. The value of his share in that company must consequently have fallen far short of what it was originally. In other respects, he was probably nearly in the same condition as in 1672. The critics, who assailed his literary reputation, had hitherto spared his private character; and, excepting Rochester, whose malignity towards Dryden now began to display itself, he probably had not lost one person whom he had thought worthy to be called a friend. Lee, who seems first to have distinguished himself about 1672, was probably then added to the number of his intimates. Milton died shortly before the publication of the « State of Innocence;» and we may wish in vain to know his opinion of that piece; but if tradition can be trusted, he said, perhaps on that undertaking, that Dryden was a good rhymer, but no poet. Blount, who had signalized himself in Dryden's defence, was now added to the number of his friends. This gentleman dedicated his « *Religio Laici*» to Dryden in 1683, as his much-honoured friend; and the poet speaks of him with kindness and respect in 1696, three years after his unfortunate and violent catastrophe.

Dryden was, however, soon to experience the mutability of the friendship of wits and courtiers. A period was speedily approaching, when the violence of political faction was

to effect a breach between our author and many of those with whom he was now intimately connected; indeed, he was already entangled in the quarrels of the great, and sustained a severe personal outrage, in consequence of a quarrel with which he had little individual concern.

SECTION IV.

Dryden's Controversy with Settle—with Rochester—He is assaulted in Rose-Street—Aureng-Zebe—Dryden meditates an Epic Poem—All for Love—Limberham—OEdipus—Troilus and Cressida—The Spanish Friar—Dryden supposed to be in opposition to the Court.

« THE State of Innocence » was published in 1674, and « Aureng-Zebe,» Dryden's next tragedy, appeared in 1675. In the interval, he informs us, his ardour for rhyming plays had considerably abated. The course of study which he imposed on himself, doubtless, led him to this conclusion. But it is also possible, that he found the peculiar facilities of that drama had excited the emulation of very inferior poets, who, by dint of show, rant, and clamorous hexameters, were likely to divide with him the public favour. Before proceeding, therefore, to state the gradual alteration in Dryden's own taste, we must perform the task of detailing the literary quarrels in which he was at this period engaged. The chief of his rivals was Elkanah Settle, a person after-

wards utterly contemptible; but who, first by the strength of a party at court, and afterwards by a faction in the state, was, for a time, buoyed up in opposition to Dryden. It is impossible to detail the progress of the contest for public favour between these two ill-matched rivals, without noticing at the same time Dryden's quarrel with Rochester, who appears to have played off Settle in opposition to him, as absolutely, and nearly as successfully, as Settle ever played off the literal puppets, for which, in the ebb of his fortune, he wrote dramas.

In the year 1673, Dryden and Rochester were on such friendly terms, that our poet inscribed to his lordship his favourite play of «Marriage à la mode;» not without acknowledgment of the deepest gratitude for favours done to his fortune and reputation. The dedication, we have seen, was so favourably accepted by Rochester, that the reception called forth a second tribute of thanks from the poet to the patron. But at this point, the interchange of kindness and of civility received a sudden and irrecoverable check. This was partly owing to Rochester's fickle and jealous temper, which induced him alternately to raise and depress the men of parts whom he loved to patronize; so that no one should ever become independent of his favour, or so rooted in the public opinion, as to be beyond the reach of

his satire; but it may also in part be attributed to Dryden's attachment to Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, afterwards Duke of Buckingham, then Rochester's rival in wit and court favour, and from whom he had sustained a deadly affront, on an occasion which, as the remote cause of a curious incident in Dryden's life, I have elsewhere detailed in the words of Sheffield himself. Rochester, who was branded as a coward in consequence of this transaction, must be reasonably supposed to entertain a sincere hatred against Mulgrave, with whom he had once lived on such friendly terms, as to inscribe to him an Epistle on their mutual poems. But, as his nerves had proved unequal to a personal conflict with his brother peer, his malice prompted the discharge of his spleen upon those men of literature whom his antagonist cherished and patronized. Among these Dryden held a distinguished situation; for, about 1675 he was, as we shall presently see, sufficiently in Sheffield's confidence to correct and revise that nobleman's poetry;[1] and in 1676 dedicated to him the tragedy of « Aureng-Zebe,» as one who enjoyed not only his favour, but his love and conversation. Thus Dryden was obnoxious to Rochester, both as holding a station among the authors of the period, grievous to the vanity of one, who

[1] Malone, Vol. I. p. 124.

aimed, by a levelling and dividing system, to be the tyrant, or at least the dictator, of wit; and also as the friend, and even the confidant, of Mulgrave, by whom the witty profligate had been baffled and humiliated. Dryden was therefore to be lowered in the public opinion; and for this purpose Rochester made use of Elkanah Settle, whom, though he gratified his malice by placing him in opposition to Dryden, he must, in his heart, have thoroughly despised.[1]

[1] Dennis's account of these feuds, though not strictly accurate, is lively, and too curious to be suppressed. «Nothing,» says Dennis, «is more certain, than that Mr Settle, who is now (1717) the city poet, was formerly a poet of the court. And at what time was he so? Why, in the reign of King Charles the Second, when that court was more gallant and more polite than ever the English court perhaps had been before; when there was at court the present and the late Duke of Buckingham, the late Earl of Dorset, Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, famous for his wit and poetry, Sir Charles Sedley, Mr Saville, Mr Buckley, and several others.

«Mr Settle's first tragedy, 'Cambyses, King of Persia,' was acted for three weeks together. The second, which was 'The Empress of Morocco,' was acted for a month together; and was in such high esteem both with the court and town, that it was acted at Whitehall before the king by the gentlemen and ladies of the court; and the prologue, which was spoken by the Lady Betty Howard, was writ by the famous Lord Rochester. The bookseller who printed it, depending upon the prepossession of the town, ventured to distinguish it from all the plays that had been ever published before; for it was the first play that ever

This play-wright, whom the jealous spleen of a favourite courtier, and the misjudging taste of a promiscuous audience, placed for some time in so high a station, came into notice in 1671, on the representation of his first play, «Cambyses, King of Persia,» which was played six nights successively. This run of public favour gave Rochester some pretence to bring Settle to the notice of the king; and, through the efforts of this mischievous wit, joined to the natural disposition of the people to be carried by show, rant, and tumult, Settle's second play, «The Empress of Morocco,» was acted with unanimous and overpowering ap-

was sold in England for two shillings, and the first that ever was printed with cuts. The booksellers at that time of day had not discovered so much of the weakness of their gentle readers as they have done since, nor so plainly discovered that fools, like children, are to be drawn in by gewgaws.—Well; but what was the event of this great success? Mr Settle began to grow insolent, as any one may see, who reads the epistle dedicatory to 'The Empress of Morocco.' Mr Dryden, Mr Shadwell, and Mr Crowne, began to grow jealous; and they three in confederacy wrote 'Remarks on the Empress of Morocco.' Mr Settle answered them; and, according to the opinion which the town then had of the matter (for I have utterly forgot the controversy), had by much the better of them all. In short, Mr Settle was then a formidable rival to Mr Dryden; and I remember very well, that not only the town, but the university of Cambridge, was very much divided in their opinions about the preference that ought to be given to them; and in both places the younger fry inclined to Elkanah.»

plause for a month together. To add to Dryden's mortification, Rochester had interest enough to have this tragedy of one whom he had elevated into the rank of his rival first acted at Whitehall by the lords and ladies of the court; an honour which had never been paid to any of Dryden's compositions, however more justly entitled to it, both from intrinsic merit, and by the author's situation as poet-laureat. Rochester contributed a prologue upon this brilliant occasion, to add still more grace to Settle's triumph; but what seems yet more extraordinary, and has, I think, been unnoticed in all accounts of the controversy, Mulgrave,[1] Rochester's rival and the friend of Dryden, did the same homage to « The Empress of Morocco.» From the king's private theatre, « The Empress of Morocco» was transferred, in all its honours, to the public stage in Dorset Garden, and received with applause corresponding to the expectation excited by its favour at Whitehall. While the court and city were thus worshipping the idol which Rochester had set up, it could hardly be expected of poor Settle, that he should be first to discern his own want of desert. On the contrary, he grew presumptuous on success; and when he

[1] Lord Mulgrave wrote the prologue when Settle's play was first acted at court; Lord Rochester's was written for the second occasion; both were spoken by the beautiful Lady Elizabeth Howard.

printed his performance, the dedication to the Earl of Norwich was directly levelled against the poet-laureat, who termed it the « most arrogant, calumniatory, ill-mannered, and senseless preface he ever saw.» [1] And, to add gall to bitterness, the bookseller thought « the Empress of Morocco» worthy of being decorated with engravings, and sold at the advanced price of two shillings; being the first drama advanced to such honourable distinction.[2] Moreover, the play is ostentatiously stated in the title to be written by Elkanah Settle, *Servant to his Majesty;*[3] an addition which the laureat had assumed with greater propriety.

If we are asked the merit of a performance which made such an impression at the time, we may borrow an expression applied to a certain orator,[4] and say, that « The Empress of Morocco» must have acted *to the tune* of a

[1] See this offensive dedication in the account of Settle's controversy with Dryden.

[2] A copy of this rare edition (the gift of my learned friend, the Rev. Henry White, of Lichfield) is now before me. The engravings are sufficiently paltry; and had the play been published even in the present day, it would have been accounted dear at two shillings. The name of the publisher is William Cademan, the date 1673. This play I had afterwards the pleasure to give to my friend, Mr John Kemble, who had not met that copy, even in his extensive research after dramatic rarities.

[3] This title is omitted in subsequent editions.

[4] Of whom it was said, that he spoke «to the tune of a good speech.»

good heroic play. It had all the outward and visible requisites of splendid scenery, prisons, palaces, fleets, combats of desperate duration and uncertain issue,[1] assassinations, a dancing tree, a rainbow, a shower of hail, a criminal executed,[2] and hell itself opening upon the stage. The rhyming dialogue too, in which the play was written, had an imperative and tyrannical sound; and to a foreigner, ignorant of the language, might have appeared as magnificent as that of Dryden. But it must raise our admiration that the witty court of Charles could patiently listen to a «tale told by an idiot, full of noise and fury, signifying nothing,» and give it a preference over the poe-

[1] As, for example, this stage-direction: «Here a company of villains, in ambush, from behind the scenes discharge their guns at Muly-Hamet; at which Muly-Hamet starting and turning, Hametalhaz from under his priest's habit draws a sword, and passes at Muly-Hamet, which pass is intercepted by Abdelcader. They engage in a very fierce fight with the villains, who also draw and assist Hametalhaz, and go off several ways fighting; after the discharge of other guns heard from within, and the clashing of swords, enter again Muly-Hamet, driving in some of the former villains, which he kills.»

[2] In the fifth act the scene draws and discovers Crimalhaz cast down on the *guanches*, i. e. hung on a wall set with spikes, scythe-blades, and hooks of iron; which scene (to judge from the engraving) exhibited the mangled limbs and wasted bones of former sufferers, suspended in agreeable confusion. With this pleasing display the piece concluded.

try of Dryden. The following description of a hail-storm in Africa will vindicate our wonder:

«This morning, as our eyes we upward cast,
The desart regions of the air lay waste.
But straight, as if it had some penance bore,
A mourning garb of thick black clouds it wore.
But on the sudden,
Some aëry demon changed its form, and now
That which look'd black above look'd white below;
The clouds dishevell'd, from their crusted locks,
Something like gems coin'd out of crystal rocks.
The ground was with this strange bright issue spread,
As if heaven in affront to nature had
Design'd some new-found tillage of its own,
And on the earth these unknown seeds had sown.
Of these I reach'd a grain, which to my sense
Appear'd as cool as virgin-innocence;
And like that too (which chiefly I admired),
Its ravish'd whiteness with a touch expired.
At the approach of heat, this candied rain
Dissolved to its first element again.
Muley H. Though showers of hail Morocco never see,
Dull priest, what does all this portend to me?
Ham. It does portend—
Muley. What?
Ham. That the fates design—
Muley. To tire me with impertinence like thine.»

Such were the strains once preferred to the magnificent verses of Dryden; whose very worst bombast is sublimity compared to them. To prove which, the reader need only peruse the Indian's account of the Spanish fleet in the «Indian Emperor,» to which the above lines are a parallel; each being the description of an

object familiar to the audience, but new to the describer. The poet felt the disgraceful preference more deeply than was altogether becoming; but he had levelled his powers, says Johnson, when he levelled his desires to those of Settle, and placed his happiness in the claps of multitudes. The moral may be carried yet farther; for had not Dryden stooped to call to the aid of his poetry the auxiliaries of scenery, gilded truncheons, and verse of more noise than meaning, it is impossible his plays could have been drawn into comparison with those of Settle. But the meretricious ornaments which he himself had introduced were within the reach of the meanest capacity; and, having been among the first to debauch the taste of the public, it was retributive justice that he should experience their inconstancy. Indeed Dryden seems himself to admit, that the principal difference between his heroic plays and «The Empress of Morocco» was, that the former were good sense, that looked like nonsense, and the latter nonsense, which yet looked very like sense. A nice distinction, and which argued some regret at having opened the way to such a rival.

The feelings of contempt ought to have suppressed those of anger; but Dryden, who professedly lived to please his own age, had not temper to wait till time should do him justice. Angry he was; and unfortunately he deter-

mined to show the world that he did well in being so. With this view, in conjunction with Shadwell and Crowne, two brother-dramatists, equally jealous of Settle's success, he composed a pamphlet, entitled, « Remarks upon the Empress of Morocco. » This piece is written in the same tone of boisterous and vulgar raillery with which Clifford and Leigh had assailed Dryden himself; and little resembles our poet's general style of controversy. He seems to have exchanged his satirical scourge for the clumsy flail of Shadwell, when he stooped to use such raillery as the following description of Settle : « In short, he is an animal of a most deplored understanding, without reading and conversation : his being is in a twilight of sense, and some glimmering of thought, which he can never fashion either into wit or English. His style is boisterous and rough-hewn ; his rhyme incorrigibly lewd, and his numbers perpetually harsh and ill-sounding. »

Settle, nothing dismayed with this vehement attack, manfully retorted the abuse which had been thrown upon him, and answered the insulting clamour of his three antagonists with clamorous insult. [1] It was obvious, that the weaker poet must be the winner by this con-

[1] Settle's pamphlet was contumaciously entitled, « Notes and Observations on the Empress of Morocco revised, with some few errata's ; to be printed instead of the Postscript with the next edition of the Conquest of Granada, 1674. »

test in abuse; and Dryden gained no more by his dispute with Settle, than a well-dressed man who should condescend to wrestle with a chimney-sweeper. The feud between them was carried no farther, until, after the publication of «Absalom and Achitophel,» party animosity added spurs to literary rivalry.

We must now return to Rochester; who, observing Settle's rise to this unmerited elevation in the public opinion, became as anxious to lower his presumption as he had formerly been to diminish the reputation of Dryden. With this view, that tyrannical person of honour availed himself of his credit to recommend Crowne to write the masque of «Calisto,» which was acted by the lords and ladies of the court of Charles in 1675. Nothing could be more galling towards Dryden, a part of whose duty as poet-laureat was to compose the pieces designed for such occasions. Crowne, though he was a tolerable comic writer,[1] had no turn whatever for tragedy, or indeed for poetry of any kind. But the splendour of the scenery and dresses, the quality of the performers, selected from the first nobility, and the favour of the sovereign, gave «Calisto» a run of nearly thirty nights. Dryden, though mortified, tendered his services in the shape of an epilogue,

[1] His comedy of «Sir Courtly Nice» exhibits marks of comic power.

to be spoken by Lady Henrietta Maria Wentworth. But the influence of his enemy, Rochester, was still predominant, and the epilogue of the laureat was rejected.

The author of «Calisto» also lost his credit with Rochester, as soon as he became generally popular; and shortly after the representation of that piece, its fickle patron seems to have recommended to the royal protection a rival more formidable to Dryden than either Settle or «starch Johnny Crowne.»[1] This was no other than Otway, whose «Don Carlos» appeared in 1676, and was hailed as one of the best heroic plays which had been written. The author avows in his preface the obligations he owed to Rochester, who had recommended him to the king and the duke, to whose favour he owed his good success, and on whose indulgence he reckoned as insuring that of his next attempt.[2] These effusions of

[1] So called, according to the communicative old correspondent of the Gentleman's Magazine in 1745, from the unalterable stiffness of his long cravat.

[2] «I am well satisfied I had the greatest party of men of wit and sense on my side: amongst which I can never enough acknowledge the unspeakable obligations I received from the Earl of R., who, far above what I am ever able to deserve from him, seemed almost to make it his business to establish it in the good opinion of the king and his royal highness; from both of which I have since received confirmations of their good-liking of it, and encouragement to proceed. And it is to him, I must, in all

gratitude did not, as Mr Malone observes, withhold Rochester, shortly after, from lampooning Otway, with circumstances of gross insult, in the «Session of the Poets.»[1] In the same preface, Otway, in very intelligible language, bade defiance to Dryden, whom he charges with having spoken slightly of his play.[2] But although Dryden did not admire the general structure of Otway's poetry, he is said, even at this time, to have borne witness to his power

gratitude, confess, I owe the greatest part of my good success in this, and on whose indulgency I extremely build my hopes of a next.» Accordingly, next year, Otway's play of «Titus and Berenice» is inscribed to Rochester, «his good and generous patron.»

[1] «Tom Otway came next, Tom Shadwell's dear zany,
And swears for heroics he writes best of any;
'Don Carlos' his pockets so amply had fill'd,
That his mange was quite cured, and his lice were all kill'd.
But Apollo had seen his face on the stage,
And prudently did not think fit to engage
The scum of a playhouse for the prop of an age.»

[2] «Though a certain writer, that shall be nameless (but you may guess at him by what follows), being ask'd his opinion of this play, very gravely cock't, and cry'd, *I'gad*, he knew not a line in it he would be authour of. But he is a fine facetious witty person, as my friend Sir Formal has it; and, to be even with him, I know a comedy of his, that has not so much as a quibble in it which I would be authour of. And so, reader, I bid him and thee farewell.» The use of Dryden's interjection, well-known through Bayes's employing it, ascertains him to be the poet meant.

of moving the passions; an acknowledgment which he long afterwards solemnly repeated. Thus Otway, like many others, mistook the character of a pretended friend, and did injustice to that of a liberal rival. Dryden and he indeed never appear to have been personal friends, even when they both wrote in the Tory interest. It was probably about this time that Otway challenged Settle, whose courage appears to have failed him upon the occasion.

Rochester was not content with exciting rivals against Dryden in the public opinion, but assailed him personally in an imitation of Horace which he quaintly entitled, « An Allusion to the Tenth Satire. » It came out anonymously about 1678, but the town was at no loss to guess that Rochester was the patron or author. Much of the satire was bestowed on Dryden, whom Rochester for the first time distinguishes by a ridiculous nickname, which was afterwards echoed by imitating dunces in all their lampoons. The lines are more cutting, because mingled with as much praise as the writer probably thought necessary to gain the credit of a candid critic.[1] Dryden, on his

[1] «Well, sir, 'tis granted; I said Dryden's rhymes
Were stolen, unequal, nay dull many times;
What foolish patron is there found of his,
So blindly partial to deny me this?

part, did not view with indifference these repeated direct and indirect attacks on his literary reputation by Rochester. In the preface

> But that his plays, embroider'd up and down
> With learning, justly pleased the town,
> In the same paper I as freely own.
> Yet, having this allow'd, the heavy mass,
> That stuffs up his loose volumes, must not pass;
> For by that rule I might as well admit
> Crowne's tedious scenes for poetry and wit.
> 'Tis therefore not enough when your false sense
> Hits the false judgment of an audience
> Of clapping fools assembling, a vast crowd,
> Till the throng'd playhouse crack'd with the dull load;
> Though even that talent merits, in some sort,
> That can divert the rabble and the court;
> Which blundering Settle never could obtain,
> And puzzling Otway labours at in vain.»

He afterwards mentions Etherege's seductive poetry, and adds:

> «Dryden in vain tried this nice way of wit;
> For he, to be a tearing blade, thought fit
> To give the ladies a dry bawdy bob;
> And thus he got the name of *Poet Squob.*
> But to be just, 'twill to his praise be found,
> His excellencies more than faults abound;
> Nor dare I from his sacred temples tear
> The laurel, which he best deserves to wear.
> But does not Dryden find even Jonson dull?
> Beaumont and Fletcher uncorrect, and full
> Of lewd lines, as he calls them? Shakspeare's style
> Stiff and affected? To his own the while
> Allowing all the justice that his pride
> So arrogantly had to these denied?

to « All for Love,» published in 1678, he gives a severe rebuke to those men of rank, who, having acquired the credit of wit, either by virtue of their quality, or by common fame, and finding themselves possessed of some smattering of Latin, become ambitious to distinguish themselves by their poetry from the herd of gentlemen. « And is not this,» he exclaims, « a wretched affectation, not to be contented with what fortune has done for them, and sit down quietly with their estates, but they must call their wits in question, and needlessly expose their nakedness to public view? Not considering that they are not to expect the same approbation from sober men, which they have found from their flatterers after the third bottle. If a little glittering in discourse has passed them on us for witty men, where was the necessity of undeceiving the world? Would a man who has an ill title to an estate, but yet is in possession of it, would he bring it of his own accord to be tried at Westminster? We who write, if we want the talent, yet have the

> And may not I have leave impartially
> To search and censure Dryden's works, and try
> If those gross faults his choice pen doth commit
> Proceed from want of judgment, or of wit?
> Or if his lumpish fancy does refuse
> Spirit and grace to his loose slattern muse?
> Five hundred verses every morning writ
> Prove him no more a poet than a wit.»

excuse, that we do it for a poor subsistence; but what can be urged in their defence, who, not having the vocation of poverty to scribble, out of mere wantonness take pains to make themselves ridiculous? Horace was certainly in the right, where he said, 'That no man is satisfied with his own condition.' A poet is not pleased, because he is not rich; and the rich are discontented, because the poets will not admit them of their number. Thus the case is hard with writers: if they succeed not, they must starve; and if they do, some malicious satire is prepared to level them, for daring to please without their leave. But while they are so eager to destroy the fame of others, their ambition is manifest in their concernment; some poem of their own is to be produced, and the slaves are to be laid flat with their faces on the ground, that the monarch may appear in the greater majesty.» This general censure of the persons of wit and honour about town is fixed on Rochester in particular, not only by the marked allusion in the last sentence, to the despotic tyranny which he claimed over the authors of his time, but also by a direct attack upon such imitators of Horace, who make doggrel of his Latin, misapply his censures, and often contradict their own. It is remarkable, however, that he ascribes this imitation rather to some zany of

the great, than to one of their number; and seems to have thought Rochester rather the patron than the author.

At the expense of anticipating the order of events, and that we may bring Dryden's dispute with Rochester to a conclusion, we must recal to the reader's recollection our author's friendship with Mulgrave. This appears to have been so intimate, that, in 1675, that nobleman entrusted him with the task of revising his « Essay upon Satire,» a poem which contained dishonourable mention of many courtiers of the time, and was particularly severe on Sir Car Scrope and Rochester. The last of these is taxed with cowardice, and a thousand odious and mean vices; upbraided with the grossness and scurrility of his writings, and with the infamous profligacy of his life.[1] The versification of the poem is as flat and inharmonious, as the plan is careless and

[1] Rochester I despise for 's mere want of wit,
Though thought to have a tail and cloven feet;
For while he mischief means to all mankind,
Himself alone the ill effects does find;
And so, like witches, justly suffers shame,
Whose harmless malice is so much the same.
False are his words, affected is his wit,
So often does he aim, so seldom hit.
To every face he cringes, while he speaks,
But when the back is turn'd, the head he breaks.
Mean in each action, lewd in every limb,
Manners themselves are mischievous in him;

ill-arranged; and though the imputation was to cost Dryden dear, I cannot think that any part of the « Essay on Satire» received additions from his pen. Probably he might contribute a few hints for revision; but the author of « Absalom and Achitophel» could never completely disguise the powers which were

A proof that chance alone makes every creature,—
A very Killigrew, without good-nature.
For what a Bessus has he always lived,
And his own kickings notably contrived;
For (there 's the folly that 's still mix'd with fear)
Cowards more blows than any hero bear.
Of fighting sparks Fame may her pleasure say,
But 'tis a bolder thing to run away.
The world may well forgive him all his ill,
For every fault does prove his penance still.
Falsely he falls into some dangerous noose,
And then as meanly labours to get loose.
A life so infamous is better quitting;
Spent in base injury and low submitting.—
I 'd like to have left out his poetry,
Forgot by all almost as well as me.
Sometimes he has some humour, never wit,
And if it rarely, very rarely hit,
'Tis under such a nasty rubbish laid,
To find it out's the cinder-woman's trade;
Who for the wretched remnants of a fire,
Must toil all day in ashes and in mire.
So lewdly dull his idle works appear,
The wretched text deserves no comments here;
Where one poor thought sometimes left all alone,
For a whole page of dulness to atone:
'Mongst forty bad, one tolerable line.
Without expression, fancy, or design.»

shortly to produce that brilliant satire. Dryden's verses must have shone among Mulgrave's as gold beside copper. The whole Essay is a mere stagnant level, no one part of it so far rising above the rest as to bespeak the work of a superior hand. The thoughts, even when conceived with some spirit, are clumsily and unhappily brought out; a fault never to be traced in the beautiful language of Dryden, whose powers of expression were at least equal to his force of conception. Besides, as Mr Malone has observed, he had now brought to the highest excellence his system of versification; and is it possible he could neglect it so far as to write the rugged lines in the note, where all manner of elliptical barbarisms are resorted to, for squeezing the words into a measure « lame and o'erburdened, and screaming its wretchedness?» The « Essay on Satire» was finally subjected by the noble author to the criticism of Pope, who, less scrupulous than Dryden, appears to have made large improvements; but, after having undergone the revision of two of the first names in English poetry, it continues to be a very indifferent performance.

In another point of view, it seems inconsistent with Dryden's situation to suppose he had any active share in the « Essay on Satire.» The character of Charles is treated with great severity, as well as those of the Duchesses of

Portsmouth and Cleveland, the royal mistresses. This was quite consistent with Mulgrave's disposition, who was at this time discontented with the ministry; but certainly would not have beseemed Dryden, who held an office at court. Sedley also, with whom Dryden always seems to have lived on friendly terms, is harshly treated in the « Essay on Satire.» It may be owned, however, that these reasons were not held powerful at the time, since they must, in that case, have saved Dryden from the inconvenient suspicion which, we will presently see, attached to him. The public were accustomed to see the friendship of wits end in mutual satire; and the good-natured Charles was so generally the subject of the ridicule which he loved, that no one seems to have thought there was improbability in a libel being composed on him by his own laureat.

The « Essay on Satire,» though written, as appears from the title-page of the last edition, in 1675, was not made public until 1679, when several copies were handed about in manuscript. Rochester sends one of these to his friend, Henry Saville, on the 21st of November, 1679, with this observation :—« I have sent you herewith a libel, in which my own share is not the least. The king, having perused it, is no way dissatisfied with his. The author is apparently Mr Dr[yden], his patron,

Lord M[ulgrave], having a panegyric in the midst.» From hence it is evident, that Dryden obtained the reputation of being the author; in consequence of which, Rochester meditated the base and cowardly revenge which he afterwards executed; and he thus coolly expressed his intention in another of his letters :—« You write me word, that I'm out of favour with a certain poet, whom I have admired for the disproportion of him and his attributes. He is a rarity which I cannot but be fond of, as one would be of a hog that could fiddle, or a singing owl. If he falls on me at the blunt, which is his very good weapon in wit, I will forgive him if you please; and *leave the repartee to black Will with a cudgel.*»

In pursuance of this infamous resolution, Dryden, upon the night of the 18th December, 1679, was waylaid by hired ruffians, and severely beaten, as he passed through Rose-street, Covent-garden, returning from Will's Coffee-house to his own house in Gerard-street. A reward of 50*l.* was in vain offered, in the London Gazette and other newspapers, for the discovery of the perpetrators of this outrage.[1] The town was, how-

[1] «Whereas John Dryden, Esq. was on Monday the 18th instant, at night, barbarously assaulted, and wounded, in Rose-street, in Covent-garden, by divers men unknown, who fled into Gerard-street, and there escaped; whoever shall discover the said persons, so as they may be taken, shall have 50*l.* reward.» London Gazette, No. 1457.

ever, at no loss to pitch upon Rochester as the employer of the bravoes, with whom the public suspicion joined the Duchess of Portsmouth, equally concerned in the supposed affront thus avenged. In our time, were a nobleman to have recourse to hired bravoes to avenge his personal quarrel against any one, more especially a person holding the rank of a gentleman, he might lay his account with being hunted out of society. But in the age of Charles, the ancient high and chivalrous sense of honour was esteemed Quixotic, and the Civil War had left traces of ferocity in the manners and sentiments of the people. Rencounters, where the assailants took all advantages of number and weapons, were as frequent, and held as honourable, as regular duels. Some of these approached closely to assassination; as in the famous case of Sir John Coventry, who was waylaid, and had

known; if any person shall make discovery of the said offenders to the said Mr Dryden, or to any justice of the peace, he shall not only receive fifty pounds, which is deposited in the hands of Mr Blanchard, goldsmith, next door to Temple-bar, for the said purpose; but if he be a principal, or an accessary, in the said fact, his Majesty is graciously pleased to promise him his pardon for the same.»—*London Gazette*, from December 18th to December 22d, 1679. Mr Malone mentions the same advertisement in a newspaper, entitled, «Domestic Intelligence, or News from City and Country.»

his nose slit by some young men of high rank, for a reflection upon the king's theatrical amours. This occasioned the famous statute against maiming and wounding, called the Coventry Act; an act highly necessary, since so far did our ancestors' ideas of manly forbearance differ from ours, that Killigrew introduces the hero of one of his comedies, a cavalier, and the fine gentleman of the piece, lying in wait for, and slashing the face of a poor courtezan, who had cheated him. [1]

It will certainly be admitted, that a man, surprised in the dark and beaten by ruffians, loses no honour by such a misfortune. But, if Dryden had received the same discipline from Rochester's own hand without resenting it, his drubbing could not have been more frequently made a matter of reproach to him;—a sign surely of the penury of subjects for satire in his life and character, since an accident, which might have happened to the greatest hero who ever lived, was resorted to as an imputation on his honour. The Rose-alley ambuscade became almost pro-

[1] I might also mention the sentiment of Count Conigsmarck, who allowed, that the barbarous assassination of Mr Thynne by his bravoes was a stain on his blood, but such a one as a good action in the wars, or a lodging on a counterscarp, would easily wash out. See his Trial, «State Trials,» vol. IV. But Conigsmarck was a foreigner.

verbial;[1] and even Mulgrave, the real author of the satire, and upon whose shoulders the blows ought in justice to have descended, mentions the circumstances in his « Art of Poetry,» with a cold and self-sufficient complacent sneer:

«Though praised and punish'd for another's rhymes,
His own deserve as great applause *sometimes*.

To which is added in a note, « A libel for which he was both applauded and wounded, though entirely ignorant of the whole matter.» This flat and conceited couplet, and note, the noble author judged it proper to omit in the cor-

[1] For example, a rare broadside in ridicule of Benjamin Harris the Whig publisher, entitled, «The Saint turned Courtezan, or a new Plot discovered by a precious Zealot of an Assault and Battery designed upon the Body of a sanctified Sister,

« Who, in her husband's absence, with a brother
Did often use to comfort one another,
Till wide-mouth'd Crop, who is an old Italian,
Took his mare nappy, and surprised her stallion,
Who, stead of entertainment from his mistress,
Did meet a cudgelling not match'd in histories.»
« Who's there?» quoth watchful Argus.
« 'T is I, in longing passion;
Give me a kiss.»
Quoth Ben, «Take this,
A Dryden salutation.»
« Help Care; Vile, Smith, and Curtes,
Each zealous covenanter!
What wonder the atheist
L'Estrange should turn papist,
When a zealot turns a ranter.»

rected edition of his poem. Otway alone, no longer the friend of Rochester, and perhaps no longer the enemy of Dryden, has spoken of the author of this dastardly outrage with the contempt his cowardly malice deserved :

> «Poets in honour of the truth should write,
> With the same spirit brave men for it fight ;
> And though against him causeless hatreds rise,
> And daily where he goes, of late, he spies
> The scowls of sullen and revengeful eyes ;
> 'T is what he knows with much contempt to bear,
> And serves a cause too good to let him fear :
> He fears no poison from incensed Drabb,
> No ruffian's five-foot sword, nor rascal's stab ;
> Nor any other snares of mischief laid,
> *Not a Rose-alley cudgel ambuscade ;*
> From any private cause where malice reigns,
> Or general pique all blockheads have to brains.»

It does not appear that Dryden ever thought it worth his while to take revenge on Rochester; and the only allusion to him in his writings may be found in the Essay prefixed to the translation of Juvenal, where he is mentioned as a man of quality, whose ashes our author was unwilling to disturb, and who had paid Dorset, to whom that piece is inscribed, the highest compliment which his self-sufficiency could afford to any one. Perhaps Dryden remembered Rochester among others, when, in the same piece, he takes credit for resisting opportunities and temptation to take revenge,

even upon those by whom he had been notoriously and wantonly provoked.

The detail of these quarrels has interrupted our account of Dryden's writings, which we are now to resume.

«Aureng-Zebe» was his first performance after the failure of the «Assignation.» It was acted in 1675 with general applause. «Aureng-Zebe» is a heroic or rhyming play, but not cast in a mould quite so romantic as the «Conquest of Granada.» There is a grave and moral turn in many of the speeches, which brings it nearer the style of a French tragedy. It is true, the character of Morat borders upon extravagance; but a certain license has been always given to theatrical tyrants, and we excuse bombast in him more readily than in Almanzor. There is perhaps some reason for this indulgence. The possession of unlimited power, vested in active and mercurial characters, naturally drives them to an extravagant indulgence of passion, bordering upon insanity; and it follows, that their language must outstrip the modesty of nature. Propriety of diction in the drama is relative, and to be referred more to individual character than to general rules: to make a tyrant sober-minded, is to make a madman rational. But this discretion must be used with great caution by the writer, lest he should confound the terrible with the burlesque. Two great

actors, Kynaston and Booth, differed in their style of playing Morat. The former, who was the original performer, and doubtless had his instructions from the author, gave full force to the sentiments of avowed and barbarous vain-glory, which mark the character. When he is determined to spare Aureng-Zebe, and Nourmahal pleads,

«'T will not be safe to let him live an hour,»

Kynaston gave all the stern and haughty insolence of despotism to his answer,

«I 'll do't to show my arbitrary power.» [1]

But Booth, with modest caution, avoided marking and pressing upon the audience a sentiment hovering between the comic and terrible, however consonant to the character by whom it was delivered. The principal incident in «Aureng-Zebe» was suggested by King Charles himself. The tragedy is dedicated to Mulgrave, whose patronage had been so effectual, as to introduce Dryden and his poetical schemes to the peculiar notice of the king and duke. The dedication and the prologue of this piece throw considerable light upon these plans, as well as upon the revolution which had gradually taken place in Dryden's dramatic taste.

[1] Cibber's Apology, 4to. p. 74.

During the space which occurred between writing the « Conquest of Granada » and « Aureng-Zebe, » our author's researches into the nature and causes of harmony of versification had been unremitted, and he had probably already collected the materials of his intended English *Prosodia*. Besides this labour, he had been engaged in a closer and more critical examination of the ancient English poets, than he had before bestowed upon them. These studies seem to have led Dryden to two conclusions; first, that the drama ought to be emancipated from the fetters of rhyme; and secondly, that he ought to employ the system of versification, which he had now perfected, to the more legitimate purpose of epic poetry. Each of these opinions merits consideration.

However hardly Dryden stood forward in defence of the heroic plays, he confessed, even in the heat of argument, that Rhyme, though he was brave and generous, and his dominion pleasing, had still somewhat of the usurper in him. A more minute inquiry seems to have still farther demonstrated the weakness of this usurped dominion; and our author's good taste and practice speedily pointed out deficiencies and difficulties, which Sir Robert Howard, against whom he defended the use of rhyme, could not show, because he never aimed at the excellencies which they impeded. The perusal of Shakspeare, on whom Dryden

had now turned his attention, led him to feel, that something farther might be attained in tragedy than the expression of exaggerated sentiment in smooth verse, and that the scene ought to represent, not a fanciful set of agents exerting their super-human faculties in a fairy-land of the poet's own creation, but human characters, acting from the direct and energetic influence of human passions, with whose emotions the audience might sympathize, because a-kin to the feelings of their own hearts. When Dryden had once discovered that fear and pity were more likely to be excited by other causes than the logic of metaphysical love, or the dictates of fantastic honour, he must have found, that rhyme sounded as unnatural in the dialogue of characters drawn upon the usual scale of humanity, as the plate and mail of chivalry would have appeared on the persons of the actors. The following lines of the Prologue to «Aureng-Zebe,» although prefixed to a rhyming play, the last which he ever wrote, expresses Dryden's change of sentiment on these points:

«Our author, by experience, finds it true,
'T is much more hard to please himself than you:
And, out of no feign'd modesty, this day
Damns his laborious trifle of a play:
Not that it 's worse than what before he writ,
But he has now another taste of wit;
And, to confess a truth, though out of time,
Grows weary of his long-loved mistress, Rhyme.

Passion 's too fierce to be in fetters bound,
And nature flies him like enchanted ground.
What verse can do, he has perform'd in this.
Which he presumes the most correct of his;
But, spite of all his pride, a secret shame
Invades his breast at Shakspeare's sacred name:
Awed when he hears his godlike Romans rage,
He, in a just despair, would quit the stage;
And to an age less polish'd, more unskill'd,
Does, with disdain, the foremost honours yield.»

It is remarkable, as a trait of character, that, though our author admitted his change of opinion on this long-disputed point, he would not consent that it should be imputed to any arguments which his opponents had the wit to bring against him. On this subject he enters a protest in the Preface to his revised edition of the « Essay of Dramatic Poesy» in 1684:— « I confess, I find many things in this discourse which I do not now approve; my judgment being not a little altered since the writing of it; but whether for the better or the worse, I know not: neither indeed is it much material, in an essay, where all I have said is problematical. For the way of writing plays in verse, which I have seemed to favour, I have, since that time, laid the practice of it aside, till I have more leisure, because I find it troublesome and slow: but I am no way altered from my opinion of it, *at least with any reasons which have opposed it;* for your lordship may easily observe, that none are very violent against it,

but those who either have not attempted it, or who have succeeded ill in their attempt.» Thus cautious was Dryden in not admitting a victory, even in a cause which he had surrendered.

But, although the poet had admitted, that with powers of versification superior to those possessed by any earlier English author, and a taste corrected by the laborious study both of the language and those who had used it, he found rhyme unfit for the use of the drama, he at the same time discovered a province where it might be employed in all its splendour. We have the mortification to learn, from the Dedication of «Aureng-Zebe,» that Dryden only wanted encouragement to enter upon the composition of an epic poem, and to abandon the thriftless task of writing for the promiscuous audience of the theatre,—a task which, rivalled as he had lately been by Crowne and Settle, he most justly compares to the labour of Sisyphus. His plot, he elsewhere explains, was to be founded either upon the story of Arthur, or of Edward the Black Prince; and he mentions it to Mulgrave in the following remarkable passage, which argues great dissatisfaction with dramatic labour, arising perhaps from a combined feeling of the bad taste of rhyming plays, the degrading dispute with Settle, and the failure of the «Assignation,» his last theatrical attempt:—«If I must be condemned to

rhyme, I should find some ease in my change of punishment. I desire to be no longer the Sisyphus of the stage; to roll up a stone with endless labour, which, to follow the proverb, *gathers no moss*, and which is perpetually falling down again. I never thought myself very fit for an employment, where many of my predecessors have excelled me in all kinds; and some of my contemporaries, even in my own partial judgment, have outdone me in comedy. Some little hopes I have yet remaining (and those too, considering my abilities, may be vain), that I may make the world some part of amends for many ill plays, by an heroic poem. Your lordship has been long acquainted with my design; the subject of which you know is great, the story English, and neither too far distant from the present age, nor too near approaching it. Such it is in my opinion, that I could not have wished a nobler occasion to do honour by it to my king, my country, and my friends; most of our ancient nobility being concerned in the action. And your lordship has one particular reason to promote this undertaking, because you were the first who gave me the opportunity of discoursing it to his majesty, and his royal highness; they were then pleased both to commend the design, and to encourage it by their commands; but the unsettledness of my condition has hitherto put a stop to my thoughts concerning it. As I am

no successor to Homer in his wit, so neither do I desire to be in his poverty. I can make no rhapsodies, nor go a begging at the Grecian doors, while I sing the praises of their ancestors. The times of Virgil please me better, because he had an Augustus for his patron; and, to draw the allegory nearer you, I am sure I shall not want a Mæcenas with him. It is for your lordship to stir up that remembrance in his majesty, which his many avocations of business have caused him, I fear, to lay aside; and, as himself and his royal brother are the heroes of the poem, to represent to them the images of their warlike predecessors; as Achilles is said to be roused to glory with the sight of the combat before the ships. For my own part, I am satisfied to have offered the design; and it may be to the advantage of my reputation to have it refused me.»

Dr Johnson and Mr Malone remark, that Dryden observes a mystery concerning the subject of his intended epic, to prevent the risk of being anticipated, as he finally was by Sir Richard Blackmore on the topic of Arthur. This, as well as other passages in Dryden's life, allows us the pleasing indulgence of praising the decency of our own time. Were an author of distinguished merit to announce his having made choice of a subject for a large poem, the writer would have more than common confidence who should venture to fore-

stall his labours. But, in the seventeenth century, such an intimation would, it seems, have been an instant signal for the herd of scribblers to souse upon it, like the harpies on the feast of the Trojans, and leave its mangled relics too polluted for the use of genius;—

«Turba sonans prædam pedibus circumvolat uncis;
Polluit ore dapes.———

Semesan prædam et vestigia fœda relinquunt.»

«Aureng-Zebe» was followed, in 1678, by «All for Love,» the only play Dryden ever wrote for himself; the rest, he says, were given to the people. The habitual study of Shakspeare, which seems lately to have occasioned, at least greatly aided, the revolution in his taste, induced him, among a crowd of emulous shooters, to try his strength in this bow of Ulysses. I have, in some preliminary remarks to the play, endeavoured to point out the difference between the manner of these great artists in treating the misfortunes of Antony and Cleopatra. If these are just, we must allow Dryden the praise of greater regularity of plot, and a happier combination of scene; but in sketching the character of Antony, he loses the majestic and heroic tone which Shakspeare has assigned him. There is too much of the lovelorn knight-errant, and too little of

the Roman warrior, in Dryden's hero. The passion of Antony, however overpowering and destructive in its effects, ought not to have resembled the love of a sighing swain of Arcadia. This error in the original conception of the character must doubtless be ascribed to Dryden's habit of romantic composition. Montezuma and Almanzor were, like the prophet's image, formed of a mixture of iron and clay; of stern and rigid demeanour to all the universe, but unbounded devotion to the ladies of their affections. In Antony, the first class of attributes are discarded; he has none of that tumid and outrageous dignity which characterized the heroes of the rhyming plays, and in its stead is gifted with even more than an usual share of devoted attachment to his mistress.[1] In the preface, Dryden piques himself upon venturing to introduce the quarrelling scene between Octavia and Cleopatra, which a French writer would have rejected, as contrary to the decorum of the theatre. But our author's idea of female character was at all times low; and the coarse, indecent violence, which he has thrown into the expressions of a

[1] This distinction our author himself points out in the Prologue. The poet there says,

> « His hero, whom you wits his bully call,
> Bates of his mettle, and scarce rants at all;
> He 's somewhat lewd, but a well-meaning mind,
> Keeps much, fights little, but is wondrous kind. »

queen and a Roman matron, is misplaced and disgusting, and contradicts the general and well-founded observation on the address and self-command, with which even women of ordinary dispositions can veil mutual dislike and hatred, and the extreme keenness with which they can arm their satire, while preserving all the external forms of civil demeanour. But Dryden more than redeemed this error in the scene between Antony and Ventidius, which he himself preferred to any that he ever wrote, and perhaps with justice, if we except that between Dorax and Sebastian: both are avowedly written in imitation of the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius. «All for Love» was received by the public with universal applause. Its success, with that of «Aureng-Zebe,» gave fresh lustre to the author's reputation, which had been somewhat tarnished by the failure of the «Assignation,» and the rise of so many rival dramatists. We learn, from the Player's petition to the Lord Chamberlain, that «All for Love» was of service to the author's fortune as well as to his fame, as he was permitted the benefit of a third night, in addition to his profits as a sharer with the company. The play was dedicated to the Earl of Danby, then a minister in high power, but who, in the course of a few months, was disgraced and imprisoned at the suit of the Commons. As Danby was a great advocate

for prerogative, Dryden fails not to approach him with an encomium on monarchical government, as regulated and circumscribed by law. In reprobating the schemes of those innovators, who, surfeiting on happiness, endeavoured to persuade their fellow subjects to risk a change, he has a pointed allusion to the Earl of Shaftesbury, who, having left the royal councils in disgrace, was now at the head of the popular faction.

In 1678 Dryden's next play, a comedy, entitled «Limberham,» was acted at Dorset-garden theatre, but was endured for three nights only. It was designed, the author informs us, as a satire on «the crying sin of keeping;» and the crime for which it suffered was, that «it expressed too much of the vice which it decried.» Grossly indelicate as this play still is, it would seem, from the Dedication to Lord Vaughan, that much which offended on the stage was altered, or omitted, in the press;[1] yet more than enough remains to justify the sentence pronounced against it by the public. Mr Malone seems to suppose Shaftesbury's party had some share in its fate, supposing that the character of Limberham had reference to their leader. Yet surely, although Shaftesbury

[1] Mr Malone has seen a MS. copy of «Limberham» in its original state, found by Bolingbroke in the sweepings of Pope's study. It contained several exceptionable passages, afterwards erased or altered.

was ridiculous for aiming at gallantry, from which his age and personal infirmity should have deterred him, Dryden would never have drawn the witty, artful politician, as a silly, hen-pecked cully. Besides, Dryden was about this time supposed even himself to have some leaning to the popular cause; a supposition irreconcilable with his caricaturing the foibles of Shaftesbury.

The tragedy of «OEdipus» was written by Dryden in conjunction with Lee; the entire first and third acts were the work of our author, who also arranged the general plan, and corrected the whole piece. Having offered some observations elsewhere upon this play, and the mode in which its celebrated theme has been treated by the dramatists of different nations, I need not here resume the subject. The time of the first representation is fixed to the beginning of the playing season, in winter 1678-9, although it was not printed until 1679.[1] Both «Limberham» and «OEdipus» were acted at the Duke's theatre; so that it would seem that our author was relieved from his contract with the King's house, probably because the shares were so much diminished in value, that his appointment was now no adequate compensation for his labour. The managers of the King's company complained

[1] By allusion to the act for burying in woollen.

to the lord chamberlain, and endeavoured, as we have seen, by pleading upon the contract, to assert their right to the play of «OEdipus.» But their claim to reclaim the poet and the play appears to have been set aside, and Dryden continued to give his performances to the Duke's theatre until the union of the two companies.

Dryden was now to do a new homage to Shakspeare, by refitting for the stage the play of «Troilus and Cressida,» which the author left in a state of strange imperfection, resembling more a chronicle, or legend, than a dramatic piece. Yet it may be disputed whether Dryden has greatly improved it even in the particulars which he censures in his original. His plot, though more artificial, is at the same time more trite than that of Shakspeare. The device by which Troilus is led to doubt the constancy of Cressida is much less natural than that she should have been actually inconstant; her vindication by suicide is a clumsy, as well as a hackneyed expedient; and there is too much drum and trumpet in the grand *finale*, where «Troilus and Diomede fight, and both parties engage at the same time. The Trojans make the Greeks retire, and Troilus makes Diomede give ground, and hurts him. Trumpets sound. Achilles enters with his Myrmidons, on the backs of the Trojans, who fight in a ring, encompassed round. Troilus, sin-

gling Diomede, gets him down, and kills him; and Achilles kills Troilus upon him. All the Trojans die upon the place, Troilus last. Such a *bellum internecivum* can never be waged to advantage upon the stage. One extravagant passage in this play serves strongly to evince Dryden's rooted dislike to the clergy. Troilus exclaims,—

«That I should trust the daughter of a priest!
Priesthood, that makes a merchandise of heaven!
Priesthood, that sells even to their prayers and blessings,
And forces us to pay for our own cozenage!
Thersites. Nay, cheats Heaven too with entrails and with offals;
Gives it the garbage of a sacrifice,
And keeps the best for private luxury.
Troilus. Thou hast deserved thy life for cursing priests.
Let me embrace thee; thou art beautiful:
That back, that nose, those eyes are beautiful:
Live; thou art honest, for thou hat'st a priest.»

Dryden prefixed to «Troilus and Cressida» his excellent remarks on the Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy, giving up, with dignified indifference, the faults even of his own pieces, when they contradict the rules his later judgment had adopted. How much his taste had altered since his «Essay of Dramatic Poesy,» or at least since his «Remarks on Heroic Plays,» will appear from the following abridgment of his new maxims. The plot, according to these remarks, ought to be simply and naturally detailed, from its commencement to its conclu-

sion,—a rule which excluded the crowded incidents of the Spanish drama; and the personages ought to be dignified and virtuous, that their misfortunes might at once excite pity and terror. The plots of Shakspeare and Fletcher are meted by this rule, and pronounced inferior in mechanic regularity to those of Ben Jonson. The characters of the agents, or persons, are next to be considered; and it is required that their manners shall be at once marked, dramatic, consistent, and natural. And here the super-eminent powers of Shakspeare, in displaying the manners, bent, and inclination of his characters, is pointed out to the reader's admiration. The copiousness of his invention, and his judgment in sustaining the ideas which he started, are illustrated by referring to Caliban, a creature of the fancy, begot by an incubus upon a witch, and furnished with a person, language, and character, befitting his pedigree on both sides. The passions are then considered as included in the manners; and Dryden, at once and peremptorily, condemns both the extravagance of language, which substitutes noise for feeling, and those points and turns of wit, which misbecome one actuated by real and deep emotion. He candidly gives an example of the last error from his own Montezuma, who, pursued by his enemies, and excluded from

the fort, describes his situation in a long simile, taken besides from the sea, which he had only heard of for the first time in the first act. As a description of natural passion, the famous procession of King Richard in the train of the fortunate usurper is quoted, in justice to the divine author. From these just and liberal rules of criticism, it is easy to discover that Dryden had already adopted a better taste, and was disgusted with comedies, where the entertainment arose from bustling incident, and tragedies, where sounding verse was substituted for the delineation of manners and expression of feeling. These opinions he pointedly delivers in the Prologue to «Troilus and Cressida,» which was spoken by Betterton, representing the ghost of Shakspeare :

«See, my loved Britons, see your Shakspeare rise,
An awful ghost confess'd to human eyes!
Unnamed, methinks, distinguish'd I had been,
From other shades, by this eternal green,
About whose wreaths the vulgar poets strive,
And, with a touch, their wither'd bays revive.
Untaught, unpractised, in a barbarous age,
I found not, but created first the stage.
And, if I drain'd no Greek or Latin store,
'T was, that my own abundance gave me more.
On foreign trade I needed not rely,
Like fruitful Britain, rich without supply.
In this, my rough-drawn play, you shall behold
Some master-strokes, so manly and so bold,
That he who meant to alter, found 'em such,
He shook, and thought it sacrilege to touch.

Now, where are the successors to my name?
What bring they to fill out a poet's fame?
Weak, short-lived issues of a feeble age;
Scarce living to be christen'd on the stage!
For humour *farce*, for love they *rhyme* dispense,
That tolls the knell for their departed sense.»

It is impossible to read these lines, remembering Dryden's earlier opinions, without acknowledging the truth of the ancient proverb, *Magna est veritas, et prevalebit.*

The «Spanish Friar,» our author's most successful comedy, succeeded «Troilus and Cressida.» Without repeating the remarks which are prefixed to the play, we may briefly notice, that in the tragic scenes our author has attained that better strain of dramatic poetry, which he afterwards evinced in «Sebastian.» In the comic part, the well-known character of Father Dominic, though the conception only embodies the abstract idea which the ignorant and prejudiced fanatics of the day formed to themselves of a Romish priest, is brought out and illustrated with peculiar spirit. The gluttony, avarice, debauchery, and meanness of Dominic, are qualified with the talent and wit necessary to save him from being utterly detestable; and, from the beginning to the end of the piece, these qualities are so happily tinged with insolence, hypocrisy, and irritability, that they cannot be mistaken for the avarice, debauchery, glut-

tony, and meanness of any other profession than that of a bad churchman. In the tragic plot, we principally admire the general management of the opening, and chiefly censure the cold-blooded barbarity and perfidy of the young queen, in instigating the murder of the deposed sovereign, and then attempting to turn the guilt on her accomplice. I fear Dryden here forgot his own general rule, that the tragic hero and heroine should have so much virtue as to entitle their distress to the tribute of compassion. Altogether, however, the «Spanish Friar,» in both its parts, is an interesting, and almost a fascinating play; although the tendency, even of the tragic scenes, is not laudable, and the comedy, though more decent in language, is not less immoral in tendency than was usual in that loose age.

Dryden attached considerable importance to the art with which the comic and tragic scenes of the «Spanish Friar» are combined; and in doing so, he has received the sanction of Dr Johnson. Indeed, as the ardour of his mind ever led him to prize that task most highly, on which he had most lately employed his energy, he has affirmed in the dedication to the «Spanish Friar,» that there was an absolute necessity for combining two actions in tragedy, for the sake of variety. «The truth is,» he adds, «the audience are grown weary of continued melancholy scenes: and I dare venture

to prophecy, that few tragedies, except those in verse, shall succeed in this age, if they are not lightened with a course of mirth; for the feast is too dull and solemn without the fiddles.» The necessity of the relief alluded to may be admitted, without allowing that we must substitute either the misplaced charms of versification, or a secondary comic plot, to relieve the solemn weight and monotony of tragedy. It is no doubt true, that a highly-buskined tragedy, in which all the personages maintain the funeral pomp usually required from the victims of Melpomene, is apt to be intolerably tiresome, after all the pains which a skilful and elegant poet can bestow upon finishing it. But it is chiefly tiresome, because it is unnatural; and, in respect of propriety, ought no more to be relieved by the introduction of a set of comic scenes, independent of those of a mournful complexion, than the *sombre* air of a funeral should be enlivened by a concert of fiddles. There appear to be two legitimate modes of interweaving tragedy with something like comedy. The first and most easy, which has often been resorted to, is to make the lower or less marked characters of the drama, like the porter in «Macbeth» or the fool in «King Lear,» speak the language appropriated to their station, even in the midst of the distresses of the piece; nay, they may be permitted to have some slight under-in-

trigue of their own. This, however, requires the exertion of much taste and discrimination; for if we are once seriously and deeply interested in the distress of the play, the intervention of any thing like buffoonery may unloose the hold which the author has gained on the feelings of the audience. If such subordinate comic characters are of a rank to intermix in the tragic dialogue, their mirth ought to be chastened, till their language bears a relation to that of the higher persons. For example, nothing can be more absurd than in «Don Sebastian,» and some of Southerne's tragedies, to hear the comic character answer in prose, and with a would-be witticism, to the solemn, unrelaxed blank verse of his tragic companion.[1] Mercutio is, I think, one of the best instances of such a comic person as may be reasonably and with propriety admitted into tragedy: From which, however, I do not exclude those lower characters, whose conversation appears absurd if much elevated above their rank. There is, however, another mode, yet more difficult to be used with address, but much more fortunate in effect when it has been successfully employed. This is, when the principal personages themselves do not always remain in the buckram of tragedy, but reserve, as in common life, lofty expressions for great

[1] This is ridiculed in «Chrononhotonthologos.»

occasions, and at other times evince themselves capable of feeling the lighter, as well as the more violent or more deep, affections of the mind. The shades of comic humour in Hamlet, in Hotspur, and in Falconbridge, are so far from injuring, that they greatly aid the effect of the tragic scenes, in which these same persons take a deep and tragical share. We grieve with them when grieved, still more, because we have rejoiced with them when they rejoiced; and, on the whole, we acknowledge a deeper *frater feeling*, as Burns has termed it, in men who are actuated by the usual changes of human temperament, than in those who, contrary to the nature of humanity, are eternally actuated by an unvaried strain of tragic feeling. But whether the poet diversifies his melancholy scenes by the passing gaiety of subordinate characters; or whether he qualifies the tragic state of his heroes by occasionally assigning lighter tasks to them; or whether he chuses to employ both modes of relieving the weight of misery through five long acts; it is obviously unnecessary that he should distract the attention of his audience, and destroy the regularity of his play, by introducing a comic plot with personages and interest altogether distinct, and intrigue but slightly connected with that of the tragedy. Dryden himself afterwards acknowledged, that,

though he was fond of the « Spanish Friar, » he could not defend it from the imputation of Gothic and unnatural irregularity; « for mirth and gravity destroy each other, and are no more to be allowed for decent, than a gay widow laughing in a mourning habit.»

The « Spanish Friar » was brought out in 1681-2, when the nation was in a ferment against the Catholics, on account of the supposed plot. It is dedicated to John, Lord Haughton, as a *protestant play* inscribed to a *protestant patron.* It was also the last dramatic work, excepting the political play of the « Duke of Guise, » and the masque of «Albion and Albanius,» brought out by our author before the Revolution. And in political tendency, the « Spanish Friar » has so different colouring from these last pieces, that it is worth while to pause to examine the private relations of the author when he composed it.

Previous to 1678, Lord Mulgrave, our author's constant, and probably effectual patron, had given him an opportunity of discoursing over his plan of an epic poem to the King and Duke of York; and in the preface to « Aureng-Zebe » in that year, the poet intimates an indirect complaint, that the royal brothers had neglected his plan. About two years afterwards, Mulgrave seems himself to

have fallen into disgrace, and was considered as in opposition to the court.[1] Dryden was deprived of his intercession, and appears in some degree to have shared his disgrace. The «Essay on Satire» became public in November 1679, and being generally imputed to Dryden, it is said distinctly by one libeller, that his pension was for a time interrupted.[2] This does not seem likely: it is more pro-

[1] He is said to have cast the eyes of ambitious affection on the Lady Anne (afterwards queen), daughter of the Duke of York; at which presumption Charles was so much offended, that when Mulgrave went to relieve Tangier in 1680, he is said to have been appointed to a leaky and frail vessel, in hopes that he might perish; an injury which he resented so highly, as not to permit the king's health to be drunk at his table till the voyage was over. On his return from Tangier he was refused the regiment of the Earl of Plymouth; and, considering his services as neglected, for a time joined those who were discontented with the government. He was probably reclaimed by receiving the government of Hull and lieutenancy of Yorkshire.

[2] In a poem called «The Laureat,» the satirist is so ill informed, as still to make Dryden the author of the «Essay on Satire.» Surely it is unlikely to suppose, that he should have submitted to the loss of a pension, which he so much needed, rather than justify himself, where justification was so easy. Yet his resentment is said to have been

> For pension lost, and justly, without doubt:
> When servants snarl we ought to kick them out.
>
> — — — — — — — — —
>
> That lost, the visor changed, you turn about,
> And strait a true-blue Protestant crept out.
> The *Friar* now was wrote; and some will say,
> They smell a malcontent through all the play.

bable that Dryden shared the general fate of the household of Charles II. whose appointments were but irregularly paid; but perhaps his supposed delinquency made it more difficult for him than others to obtain redress. At this period broke out the pretended discovery of the Popish Plot, in which Dryden, even in «Absalom and Achitophel,» evinces a partial belief. Not encouraged, if not actually discountenanced, at court; sharing in some degree the discontent of his patron Mulgrave; above all, obliged by his situation to please the age in which he lived, Dryden did not probably hold the reverence of the Duke of York so sacred, as to prevent his making the ridicule of the Catholic religion the means of recommending his play to the passions of the audience. Neither was his situation at court in any danger from his closing on this occasion with the popular tide. Charles, during the heat of the Popish Plot, was so far from being in a situation to incur odium by dismissing a laureat for having written a *Protestant play*, that he was obliged for a time to throw the reins of government into the hands of those very persons, to whom the Papists were most obnoxious. The inference drawn from Dryden's performance was, that he had deserted the court; and the

[1] This point has been before alluded to.

Duke of York was so much displeased with the tenor of the play, that it was the only one, of which, on acceding to the crown, he prohibited the representation. The «Spanish Friar» was often objected to the author by his opponents, after he had embraced the religion there satirised. Nor was the idea of his apostacy from the court an invention of his enemies after his conversion, for it prevailed at the commencement of the party-disputes; and the name of Dryden is, by a partizan of royalty, ranked with that of his bitter foe Shadwell, as followers of Shaftesbury in 1680.[1] But whatever cause of coolness or disgust our author had received from Charles or his brother, was removed, as usual, as soon as his services became necessary; and thus the supposed author of a libel on the king became the ablest defender of the cause of monarchy, and the author of the «Spanish Friar» the advocate and convert of the Catholic religion.

In his private circumstances Dryden must have been even worse situated than at the close of the last Section. His contract with the King's Company was now ended, and long before seems to have produced him little

[1] In «A Modest Vindication of Antony, Earl of Shaftesbury, in a Letter to a Friend concerning his having been elected King of Poland,» Dryden is named poet-laureat to the supposed king-elect, and Shadwell his deputy.

profit. If Southerne's biographer can be trusted, Dryden never made by a single play more than one hundred pounds; so that, with all his fertility, he could not, at his utmost exertion, make more than two hundred a-year by his theatrical labours.[1] At the same time, they so totally engrossed his leisure, that he produced no other work of consequence after the «*Annus Mirabilis.*»[2] If, therefore, the payment of his pension was withheld, whether from the resentment of the court, or the poverty of the exchequer, he might well complain of the «unsettled state,» which doomed him to continue these irksome and ill-paid labours.

[1] «Dryden being very desirous of knowing how much Southerne had made by the profits of one of his plays, the other, conscious of the little success Dryden had met with in theatrical compositions, declined the question, and answered, he was really ashamed to acquaint him. Dryden continuing to be solicitous to be informed, Southerne owned he had cleared by his last play 70*l.*; which appeared astonishing to Dryden, who was perhaps ashamed to confess, that he had never been able to acquire, by any of his most successful pieces, more than 100*l.*»—*Life of Southerne*, prefixed to his Plays.

[2] There was published, 1679, a translation of Appian, printed for John Amery at the Peacock, against St Dunstan's Church, Fleet-street. It is inscribed by the translator, J. D., to the Earl of Ossory; and seems to have been undertaken by his command. This work is usually termed, in catalogues, Dryden's Appian. I presume it may be the work of that Jonathan Dryden, who is mentioned p. 27.

SECTION V.

Dryden engages in Politics—Absalom and Achitophel, Part First—The Medal—Mac-Flecknoe—Absalom and Achitophel, Part Second—The Duke of Guise.

The controversies, in which Dryden had hitherto been engaged, were of a private complexion, arising out of literary disputes and rivalry. But the country was now deeply agitated by political faction; and so powerful an auxiliary was not permitted by his party to remain in a state of inactivity. The religion of the Duke of York rendered him obnoxious to a large proportion of the people, still agitated by the terrors of the Popish Plot. The Duke of Monmouth, handsome, young, brave, and courteous, had all the external requisites for a popular idol; and what he wanted in mental qualities was amply supplied by the Machiavel subtlety of Shaftesbury. The life of Charles was the only isthmus between these contending tides, «which, mounting, viewed each other from

afar, and strove in vain to meet.» It was already obvious, that the king's death was to be the signal of civil war. His situation was doubly embarrassing, because, in all probability, Monmouth, whose claims were both unjust in themselves and highly derogatory to the authority of the crown, was personally amiable, and more beloved by Charles than was his inflexible and bigotted brother. But to consent to the bill for excluding the lawful heir from the crown, would have been at the same time putting himself in a state of pupilage for the rest of his reign, and evincing to his subjects, that they had nothing to expect from attachment to his person, or defence of his interest. This was a sacrifice not to be thought of so long as the dreadful recollection of the wars in the preceding reign determined a large party to support the monarch, while he continued willing to accept of their assistance. Charles accordingly adopted a determined course; and, to the rage rather than confusion of his partisans, Monmouth was banished to Holland, from whence he boldly returned without the king's licence, and openly assumed the character of the leader of a party. Estranged from court, he made various progresses through the country, and employed every art which the genius of Shaftesbury could suggest, to stimulate the

courage, and to increase the number, of his partisans. The press, that awful power, so often and so rashly misused, was not left idle. Numbers of the booksellers were distinguished as Protestant or fanatical publishers; and their shops teemed with the furious declamations of Ferguson, the inflammatory sermons of Hickeringill, the political disquisitions of Hunt, and the party plays and libellous poems of Settle and Shadwell. A host of rhymers, inferior even to those last named, attacked the king, the Duke of York, and the ministry, in songs and libels, which, however paltry, were read, sung, rehearsed, and applauded. It was time that some champion should appear in behalf of the crown, before the public should have been irrecoverably alienated by the incessant and slanderous clamour of its opponents. Dryden's place, talents, and mode of thinking, qualified him for this task. He was the poet-laureat and household servant of the king, thus tumultuously assailed. His vein of satire was keen, terse, and powerful, beyond any that has since been displayed. From the time of the Restoration he had been a favourer of monarchy, perhaps more so, because the opinion divided him from his own family. If he had been for a time neglected, the smiles of a sovereign soon made his coldness forgotten; and if his narrow fortune was not increased, or even ren-

dered stable, he had promises of provision, which inclined him to look to the future with hope, and endure the present with patience. If he had shared in the discontent which for a time severed Mulgrave from the royal party, that cause ceased to operate when his patron was reconciled to the court, and received a share of the spoils of the disgraced Monmouth.[1] If there wanted further impulse to induce Dryden, conscious of his strength, to mingle in an affray where it might be displayed to advantage, he had the stimulus of personal attachment and personal enmity, to sharpen his political animosity. Ormond, Halifax, and Hyde, Earl of Rochester, among the nobles, were his patrons; Lee and Southerne, among the poets, were his friends. These were partisans of royalty. The Duke of York, whom the «Spanish Friar» probably had offended, was conciliated by a prologue on his visiting the theatre at his return from Scotland, and, it is said, by the omission of certain peculiarly offensive passages, as soon as the play was reprinted.[2] The opposite ranks contained

[1] Mulgrave was created lieutenant of Yorkshire and governor of Hull, when Monmouth was deprived of these and other honours.

[2] This is objected to Dryden by one of his antagonists: «Nor could ever Shimei be thought to have cursed David more bitterly, than he permits his friend to blaspheme

Buckingham, author of the « Rehearsal; » Shadwell, with whom our poet now urged open war; and Settle, the insolence of whose rivalry was neither forgotten, nor duly avenged. The respect due to Monmouth was probably the only consideration to be overcome : but his character was to be handled with peculiar lenity; and his duchess, who, rather than himself, had patronised Dryden, was so dissatisfied with his politics, as well as the other irregularities of her husband, that there was no danger of her taking a gentle correction of his ambition as any affront to herself. Thus stimulated by every motive, and withheld by none, Dryden composed, and on the 17th November 1681 published, the satire of «Absalom and Achitophel.»

The plan of the satire was not new to the public. A catholic poet had, in 1679, paraphrased the scriptural story of Naboth's vineyard, and applied it to the condemnation of Lord Stafford, on account of the Popish Plot. This poem is written in the style of a scriptural allusion; the names and situations of personages in the holy text being applied to

the Roman priesthood in his epilogue to the 'Spanish Friar.' In which play he has himself acted his own part like a true younger son of Noah, as may be easily seen in the first edition of that comedy, which would not pass muster a second time without emendations and corrections.»—*The Revolter*, 1687, p. 29.

those contemporaries, to whom the author assigned a place in his piece. Neither was the obvious application of the story of Absalom and Achitophel to the persons of Monmouth and Shaftesbury first made by our poet. A prose paraphrase, published in 1680, had already been composed upon this allusion. But the vigour of the satire, the happy adaptation, not only of the incidents, but of the very names to the individuals characterized, gave Dryden's poem the full effect of novelty. It appeared a very short time after Shaftesbury had been committed to the Tower, and only a few days before the grand jury were to take under consideration the bill preferred against him for high treason. Its sale was rapid beyond example; and even those who were most severely characterized were compelled to acknowledge the beauty, if not the justice, of the satire. The character of Monmouth, an easy and gentle temper, inflamed beyond its usual pitch by ambition, and seduced by the arts of a wily and interested associate, is touched with exquisite delicacy. The poet is as careful of the offending Absalom's fame, as the father in Scripture of the life of his rebel son. The fairer side of his character is industriously presented, and a veil drawn over all that was worthy of blame. But Shaftesbury pays the lenity with which Monmouth is dismissed. The

traits of praise, and the tribute paid to that statesman's talents, are so qualified and artfully blended with censure, that they seem to render his faults even more conspicuous, and more hateful. In this skilful mixture of applause and blame lies the nicest art of satire. There must be an appearance of candour on the part of the poet, and just so much merit allowed, even to the object of his censure, as to make his picture natural. It is a child alone who fears the aggravated terrors of a Saracen's head; the painter, who would move the awe of an enlightened spectator, must delineate his tyrant with human features. It seems likely, that Dryden considered the portrait of Shaftesbury, in the first edition of « Absalom and Achitophel, » as somewhat deficient in this respect; at least the second edition contains twelve additional lines, the principal tendency of which is to praise the ability and integrity with which Shaftesbury had discharged the office of Lord High Chancellor. It has been reported, that this mitigation was intended to repay a singular exertion of generosity on Shaftesbury's part, who, while smarting under the lash of Dryden's satire, and in the short interval between the first and second edition of the poem, had the liberality to procure admission for the poet's son upon the foundation of the Charterhouse, of which he was then governor.

But Mr Malone has fully confuted this tale, and shown, from the records of the seminary, that Dryden's son Erasmus was admitted upon the recommendation of the king himself. The insertion, therefore, of the lines in commemoration of Shaftesbury's judicial character, was a voluntary effusion on the part of Dryden, and a tribute which he seems to have judged it proper to pay to the merit even of an enemy. Others of the party of Monmouth, or rather of the opposition party (for it consisted, as is commonly the case, of a variety of factions, agreeing in the single principle of opposition to the government), were stigmatized with severity, only inferior to that applied to Achitophel. Among these we distinguish the famous Duke of Buckingham, with whom, under the character of Zimri, our author balanced accounts for his share in the « Rehearsal; » Bethel, the Whig sheriff, whose scandalous avarice was only equalled by his factious turbulence; and Titus Oates, the pretended discoverer of the Popish Plot. The account of the Tory chiefs, who retained, in the language of the poem, their friendship for David at the expense of the popular hatred, included, of course, most of Dryden's personal protectors. The aged Duke of Ormond is panegyrized with a beautiful apostrophe to the memory of his son, the gallant Earl of Ossory. The bishops of Lon-

don and Rochester; Mulgrave, our author's constant patron, now reconciled with Charles and his government; the plausible and trimming Halifax; and Hyde, Earl of Rochester, second son to the great Clarendon, appear in this list. The poet having thus arrayed and mustered the forces on each side, some account of the combat is naturally expected; and Johnson complains, that, after all the interest excited, the story is but lamely winded up by a speech from the throne, which produces the instantaneous and even marvellous effect of reconciling all parties, and subduing the whole phalanx of opposition. Even thus, says the critic, the walls, towers, and battlements of an enchanted castle disappear, when the destined knight winds his horn before it. Spence records in his Anecdotes, that Charles himself imposed on Dryden the task of paraphrasing the speech to his Oxford parliament, at least the most striking passages, as a conclusion to his poem of «Absalom and Achitophel.»

But let us consider whether the nature of the poem admitted of a different management in the close. Incident was not to be attempted; for the poet had described living characters and existing factions, the issue of whose contention was yet in the womb of fate, and could not safely be anticipated in the satire. Besides, the dissolution of the Oxford parlia-

ment with that memorable speech, was a remarkable era in the contention of the factions, after which the Whigs gradually declined, both in spirit, in power, and in popularity. Their boldest leaders were for a time appalled;[1] and when they resumed their measures, they gradually approached rather revolution than reform, and thus alienated the more temperate of their own party, till at length their schemes terminated in the Rye-house Conspiracy. The speech, having such an effect, was therefore not improperly adopted as a termination to the poem of «Absalom and Achitophel.»

The success of this wonderful satire was so great, that the court had again recourse to the assistance of its author. Shaftesbury was now liberated from the Tower; for the grand jury, partly influenced by deficiency of proof, and partly by the principles of the Whig party, out of which the sheriffs had carefully selected them, refused to find the bill of high

[1] Lord Grey says in his narrative, «After the dissolution of the Oxford parliament, we were all very peaceably inclined, and nothing passed amongst us that summer of importance, which I can call to mind: I think my Lord Shaftesbury was sent to the Tower just before the long vacation; and the Duke of Monmouth, Mr Montague, Sir Thomas Armstrong, and myself, went to Tunbridge immediately after his lordship's imprisonment, where we laid aside the thoughts of disturbing the peace of the government for those of diverting ourselves.»

treason against him. This was a subject of unbounded triumph to his adherents, who celebrated his acquittal by the most public marks of rejoicing. Amongst others, a medal was struck, bearing the head and name of Shaftesbury, and on the reverse, a sun, obscured with a cloud, rising over the Tower and city of London, with the date of the refusal of the bill (24th November, 1681), and the motto LÆTAMUR. These medals, which his partisans wore ostentatiously at their bosoms, excited the general indignation of the Tories; and the king himself is said to have suggested it as a theme for the satirical muse of Dryden, and to have rewarded his performance with a hundred broad pieces. To a poet of less fertility, the royal command, to write again upon a character which, in a former satire, he had drawn with so much precision and felicity, might have been as embarrassing at least as honourable. But Dryden was inexhaustible; and easily discovered, that, though he had given the outline of Shaftesbury in «Absalom and Achitophel,» the finished colouring might merit another canvass. About the sixteenth of March, 1681, he published, anonymously, «The Medal, a Satire against Sedition,» with the apt motto,

«Per Graium populos, mediæque per Elidis urbem
Ibat ovans; Divumque sibi poscebat honores.»

In this satire, Shaftesbury's history; his frequent political apostacies; his licentious course of life, so contrary to the stern rigour of the fanatics, with whom he had associated; his arts in instigating the fury of the anti-monarchists; in fine, all the political and moral bearings of his character,—are sounded and exposed to contempt and reprobation, the beauty of the poetry adding grace to the severity of the satire. What impression these vigorous and well-aimed darts made upon Shaftesbury, who was so capable of estimating their sharpness and force, we have no means to ascertain; but, long afterwards, his grandson, the author of the «Characteristics,» speaks of Dryden and his works with a bitter affectation of contempt, offensive to every reader of judgment, and obviously formed on prejudice against the man, rather than dislike to the poetry.[1] It is said, that he felt

[1] He usually distinguishes Dryden by his «Rehearsal» title of Bayes; and, among many other oblique expressions of malevolence, he has this note:—

«To see the incorrigibleness of our poets in their pedantic manner, their vanity, defiance of criticism, their rhodomontade, and poetical bravado, we need only turn to our famous poet-laureat (the very Mr Bayes himself), in one of his latest and most valued pieces, writ many years after the ingenious author of the «Rehearsal» had drawn his picture. 'I have been listening (say sour poet, in his Preface to 'Don Sebastian'), what objections had been made against the conduct of the play, but found them all

more resentment on account of the character of imbecility adjudged to his father in «Absalom and Achitophel,» than for all the pungent satire, there and in the «Medal,» bestowed upon his grandfather; an additional proof, how much more easy it is to bear those reflections which render ourselves or our friends hateful, than those by which they are only made ridiculous and contemptible.

The Whig poets, for many assumed that title, did not behold these attacks upon their

so trivial, that if I should name them, a true critic would imagine that I played booty. Some are pleased to say the writing is dull; but *ætatem habet, de se loquatur.* Others, that the double poison is unnatural; let the common received opinion, and Ausonius's famous epigram, answer that. Lastly, a more ignorant sort of creatures than either of the former maintain, that the character of Dorax is not only unnatural, but inconsistent with itself; let them read the play, and think again. A longer reply is what those cavillers deserve not. But I will give them and their fellows to understand, that the Earl of ——— was pleased to read the tragedy twice over before it was acted, and did me the favour to send me word, that I had written beyond any of my former plays, and that he was displeased any thing should be cut away. If I have not reason to prefer his single judgment to a whole faction, let the world be judge; for the opposition is the same with that of Lucan's hero against an army, *concurrere bellum atque virum.* I think I may modestly conclude,' etc.

«Thus he goes on, to the very end, in the self-same strain. Who, after this, can ever say of the 'Rehearsal' author, that his picture of our poet was over-charged, or the national humour wrong described?»

leader and party with patience or forbearance; but they rushed to the combat with more zeal, or rather fury, than talent or policy. Their efforts are numbered and described elsewhere; so that we need here only slightly notice those which Dryden thought worthy of his own animadversion. Most of them adopted the clumsy and obvious expedient of writing their answers in the style of the successful satire which had provoked them. Thus, in reply to « Absalom and Achitophel,» Pordage and Settle imitated the plan of bestowing scriptural names on their poem and characters; the former entitling his piece, « Azaria and Hushai,» the latter, «Absalom Senior, or Absalom and Achitophel transposed.» But these attempts to hurl back the satire at him, by whom it was first launched, succeeded but indifferently, and might have convinced the authors, that the charm of « Absalom and Achitophel» lay not in the plan, but in the power of execution. It was easy to give Jewish titles to their heroes, but the difficulty lay in drawing their characters with the force and precision of their prototype. Buckingham himself was rash enough to engage in this conflict; but, whether his anger blunted his wit, or that his share in the « Rehearsal» was less even than what is generally supposed, he loses by his « Reflections on Absalom and Achitophel,» the credit we are disposed to

allow him for talent on the score of that lively piece. A non-conformist clergyman published two pieces, which I have never seen, one entitled, « A Whip for the Fool's Back, who styles honourable Marriage a cursed confinement, in his profane Poem of Absalom and Achitophel ; » the other « A Key, with the Whip, to open the Mystery and Iniquity of the Poem called Absalom and Achitophel. » Little was to be hoped or feared from poems bearing such absurd titles : I throw, however, into the note, the specimen which Mr Malone has given of their contents. [1] The reverend

[1] «How well this Hebrew name with sense doth sound,
*A fool 's my brother,** though in wit profound!
Most wicked wits are the devil's chiefest tools,
Which, ever in the issue, God befools.
Can thy compare, vile varlet, once hold true,
Of the loyal lord, and this disloyal Jew?
Was e'er our English earl under disgrace,
And, as unconscionable, put out of place?
Hath he laid lurking in his country-house
To plot rebellions, as one factious?
Thy bog-trot bloodhounds hunted have this stag,
Yet cannot fasten their foul fangs,—they flag.
Why did'st not *thou* bring in thy evidence
With them, to rectify the brave jury's sense.
And so prevent the *ignoramus?*—nay,
Thou wast cock-sure he would be damn'd for aye,
Without thy presence ;—thou wast then employ'd
To brand him 'gainst he came to be destroy'd :
'Forehand preparing for the hangman's axe,
Had not the witnesses been found so lax.»

* *Achi,* my brother, and *tophel,* a fool.—*Orig. Note.*

gentleman having announced, that Achitophel, in Hebrew, means « the brother of a fool,» Dryden retorted, with infinite coolness, that in that case the author of the discovery might pass with his readers for next a-kin, and that it was probably the relation which made the kindness.

« The Medal» was answered by the same authors who replied to « Absalom and Achitophel,» as if the Whigs had taken in sober earnest the advice which Dryden bestowed on them in the preface to that satire. And moreover (as he there expressly recommends) they railed at him abundantly, without a glimmering of wit to enliven their scurrility. Hickeringill, a crazy fanatic, began the attack with a sort of mad poem, called « The Mushroom.» It was written and sent to press the very day on which « The Medal» appeared; a circumstance on which the author valued himself so highly, as to ascribe it to divine inspiration. With more labour, and equal issue, Samuel Pordage, a minor poet of the day, produced « The Medal Reversed;» for which, and his former aggression, Dryden brands him, in a single line of the Second Part of « Absalom and Achitophel,» as

«Lame Mephibosheth, the wizard's [1] son.»

[1] He was the son of Dr John Pordage, minister of Bradfield, expelled his charge for insufficiency in the year

There also appeared « The Loyal Medal Vindicated,» and a piece entitled « Dryden's Satire to his Muse,» imputed to Lord Somers, but which, in conversation with Pope, he positively disavowed. All these, and many other pieces, the fruits of incensed and almost frantic party-fury, are marked by the most coarse and virulent abuse. The events in our author's life were few, and his morals, generally speaking, irreproachable; so that the

1646. Among other charges against him were the following, which, extraordinary as they are, he does not seem to have denied:

«That he hath very frequent and familiar converse with angels.

«That a great dragon came into his chamber with a tail of eight yards long, four great teeth, and did spit fire at him; and that he contended with the dragon.

«That his own angel came and stood by him while he was expostulating with the dragon; and the angel came in his own shape and fashion, the same clothes, bands, and cuffs, the same bandstrings; and that his angel stood by him and upheld him.

«That Mrs Pordage and Mrs Flavel had their angels standing by them also, Mrs Pordage singing sweetly, and keeping time upon her breast; and that his children saw the spirits coming into the house, and said, Look there, father; and that the spirits did after come into the chamber, and drew the curtains when they were in bed.

«That the said Mr Pordage confessed, that a strong enchantment was upon him, and that the devil did appear to him in the shape of Everard, and in the shape of a fiery dragon; and the whole roof of the house was full of spirits.»—*State Trials.*

topics for the malevolence of his antagonists were both scanty and strained. But they ceased not, with the true pertinacity of angry dulness, to repeat, in prose and verse, in couplet, ballad, and madrigal, the same unvaried accusations, amounting in substance to the following : That Dryden had been bred a puritan and republican; that he had written a Eulogy on Cromwell (which one wily adversary actually reprinted); that he had been in poverty at the Restoration; that Lady Elizabeth Dryden's character was tarnished by the circumstances attending their nuptials; that Dryden had written the « Essay on Satire,» in which the king was libelled; that he had been beaten by three men in Rose-alley; finally, that he was a Tory, and a tool of arbitrary power. This cuckoo song, garnished with the burden of *Bayes* and *Poet Squab*,[1] was rung in the ear of the public again and again, and with an obstinacy which may convince us how little there was to be said, when that little was so often repeated. Feeble as these attacks were, their number, like that

[1] How little Dryden valued these nicknames appears from a passage in the «Vindication of the Duke of Guise:» —« Much less am I concerned at the noble name of Bayes; that is a brat so like his own father, that he cannot be mistaken for any body else. They might as reasonably have called Tom Sternhold Virgil, and the resemblance would have held as well.»

of the gnats described by Spenser,[1] seems to have irritated Dryden to exert the power of his satire, and, like the blast of the northern wind, to sweep away at once these clamorous and busy, though ineffectual assailants. Two, in particular, claimed distinction from the nameless crowd; Settle, Dryden's ancient foe, and Shadwell, who had been originally a dubious friend.

Of Dryden's controversy with Settle we have already spoken fully; but we may here add, that, in addition to former offences of a public and private nature, Elkanah, in the Prologue to the «Emperor of Morocco,» acted in March 1681-2, had treated Dryden with great irreverence.[2] Shadwell had been for some time

[1] «As when a swarm of gnats at even tide
Out of the fennes of Allan doe arise,
Their murmuring small trompetts sownden wide,
Whiles in the aire their clustring army flies,
That as a cloud doth seeme to dim the skies;
No man nor beast may rest or take repast
For their sharpe wounds and noyous injuries,
Till the fierce northern wind with blustring blast
Doth blow them quite away, and in the ocean cast.»

[2] «How finely would the sparks be caught to-day,
Should a Whig poet write a Tory play,
And you, possess'd with rage before, should send
Your random shot abroad and maul a friend!
For you, we find, too often hiss and clap,
Just as you live, speak, think, and fight—by hap.
And poets, we all know, can change, like you,
And are alone to their own interest true;

in good habits with Dryden; yet an early difference of taste and practice in comedy, not only existed between them, but was the subject of reciprocal debate, and something approaching to rivalry. Dryden, as we have seen, had avowed his preference of lively dialogue in comedy to delineation of character; or, in other words, of wit and repartee to what was then called humour. On this subject Shadwell early differed from the laureat. Conscious of considerable powers in observing nature, while he was deficient in that liveliness of fancy which is necessary to produce vivacity of dialogue, Shadwell affected, or perhaps entertained, a profound veneration for the memory of Ben Jonson, and proposed him as his model in the representation of such characters as were to be marked by *humour*, or an affectation of singularity of manners, speech, and behaviour. Dryden, on the other hand, was no great admirer either of Jonson's plays in general, or of the low and coarse characters of vice and folly, in describing which lay his chief excellency; and this opinion he had publicly intimated in the «Essay of dramatic poesy.» In the preface to the very first of Shadwell's plays, printed in 1668, he takes

Can write against all sense, nay even their own:
The vehicle called *pension* makes it down.
No fear of cudgels, where there 's hope of bread;
A well-filled paunch forgets a *broken head.*»

occasion bitterly, and with a direct application to Dryden, to assail the grounds of this criticism, and the comedies of the author who had made it.[1] If this petulance produced any ani-

[1] I quote the passage at length, as evincing the difference between Dryden's taste in comedy and that of Shadwell:

«I have endeavoured to represent variety of humours (most of the persons of the play differing in their characters from one another), which was the practice of Ben Jonson, whom I think all dramatick poets ought to imitate, though none are like to come near; he being the onely person that appears to me to have made perfect representation of human life: most other authors that I ever read, either have wild romantick tales, wherein they strain love and honour to that ridiculous height, that it becomes burlesque; or in their lower comedies content themselves with one or two humours at most, and those not near so perfect characters as the admirable Jonson always made, who never wrote comedy without seven or eight considerable humours. I never saw one, except that of Falstaffe, that was, in my judgment, comparable to any of Jonson's considerable humours. You will pardon this digression when I tell you, he is the man, of all the world, I most passionately admire for his excellency in dramatick poetry.

«Though I have known *some of late so insolent to say*, that Ben Jonson wrote his best playes without wit, imagining, that all the wit playes consisted in bringing two persons upon the stage to break jest, and to bob one another, which they call repartie, not considering, that there is more wit and invention required in the finding out good humour and matter proper for it, then in all their smart reparties; for, in the writing of a humour, a man is confined not to swerve from the character, and obliged so say nothing but what is proper to it; but in the playes

mosity, it was not lasting; for, in the course of their controversy, Dryden appeals to Shadwell, whether he had not rather countenanced than impeded his first rise in public favour; and, in 1674, they made common cause with Crowne to write those Remarks, which were to demolish Settle's «Empress of Morocco.»

which have been wrote of late, there is no such thing as perfect character, but the two chief persons are most commonly a swearing, drinking, whoring ruffian for a lover, and impudent, ill-bred tomrig for a mistress, and these are the fine people of the play; and there is that latitude in this, that almost any thing is proper for them to say; but their chief subject is bawdy, and profaneness, which they call brisk writing, when the most dissolute of men, that rellish those things well enough in private, are choked at 'em in publick: and, methinks, if there were nothing but the ill manners of it, it should make poets avoid that indecent way of writing.»—*Preface to the Sullen Lovers.*

Lest this provocation should be insufficient, the Prologue of the same piece has a fling at heroic plays. The poet says he has

> «No kind romantic lover in his play
> To sigh and whine out passion, such as may
> Charm waiting-women with heroic chime,
> And still resolve to live and die in rhyme;
> Such as your ears with love and honour feast,
> And play at crambo for three hours at least;
> That fight and woo in verse in the same breath,
> And make similitude and love in death.»

Whatever symptoms of reconciliation afterwards took place between the poets, I greatly doubt if this first offence was ever cordially forgiven.

Even in 1676, while Shadwell expresses the same dissent from Dryden's opinion concerning the merit of Jonson's comedy, it is in very respectful terms, and with great deference to his respected and admired friend, of whom, though he will not say his is the best way of writing, he maintains his manner of writing it is most excellent. But the irreconcilable difference in their taste soon after broke out in less seemly terms; for Shadwell permitted himself to use some very irreverent expressions towards Dryden's play of « Aureng-Zebe,» in the Prologue and Epilogue to his comedy of the «Virtuoso;» and in the Preface to the same piece he plainly intimated, that he wanted nothing but a pension to enable him to write as well as the poet-laureat. This attack was the more intolerable, as Dryden, in the Preface to that very play of « Aureng-Zebe,» probably meant to include Shadwell among those contemporaries who, even in his own judgment, excelled him in comedy. In 1678, Dryden accommodated with a prologue Shadwell's play of the «True Widow;» but to write these occasional pieces was part of his profession, and the circumstance does not prove that the breach between these rivals for public applause was ever thoroughly healed; on the contrary, it seems likely that, in the case of Shadwell, as in that of Settle, political hatred only gangrened a wound inflicted by literary rivalry. After

their quarrel became desperate, Dryden resumed his prologue, and adapted it to a play by Afra Behn, called the «Widow Ranter, or Bacon in Virginia.» Whatever was the progress of the dispute, it is certain that Shadwell, as zealously attached to the Whig faction as Dryden to the Tories, buckled on his armour among their other poetasters to encounter the champion of royalty. His answer to «The Medal» is entitled «The Medal of John Bayes:» it appeared in autumn 1681, and is distinguished by scurrility, even among the scurrilous lampoons of Settle, Care, and Pordage. «Those,» he coolly says, «who know Dryden, know there is not an untrue word spoke of him in the poem;» although he is there charged with the most gross and infamous crimes. Shadwell also seems to have had a share in a lampoon, entitled «The Tory Poets,» in which both Dryden and Otway were grossly reviled.[1] On both occasions, his satire was as clumsy as his overgrown person, and as brutally coarse as his conversation: for Shadwell resembled Ben Jonson in his vulgar and intemperate pleasures, as well as in his style of comedy and

[1] «The laurel makes a wit; a brave, the sword;
And all are wise men at a council-board:
Settle's a coward, 'cause fool Otway fought him,
And Mulgrave is a wit, because I taught him.»

The Tory Poets, 4to. 1682.

corpulence of body.[1] Dryden seems to have thought, that such reiterated attacks, from a contemporary of some eminence, whom he had once called friend, merited a more severe castigation than could be administered in a general satire. He therefore composed « Mac-Flecknoe, or a Satire on the True Blue Protes-

[1] Jonson is described as wearing a loose coachman's coat, frequenting the Mermaid tavern, where he drunk seas of Canary, then reeling home to bed, and, after a profuse perspiration, arising to his dramatic studies. Shadwell appears, from the slight traits which remain concerning him, to have followed, as closely as possible, the same course of pleasure and of study. He was brutal in his conversation, and much addicted to the use of opium, to which, indeed, he is said finally to have fallen a victim.

I observe, the ingenious editor of the late excellent edition of Jonson's Works expresses some indignation at the charge brought against that eminent author in this note, and denies the authority of the letter-writer, who characterizes Jonson as indulging in vulgar excess. Few men have more sincere admiration for Jonson's talents than the present writer. But surely that coarseness of taste, which tainted his powerful mind, is proved from his writings. Many authors of that age are indecent, but Jonson is filthy and gross in his pleasantry, and indulges himself in using the language of scavengers and night-men. His Bartholomew-fair furnishes many examples of this unhappy predilection, and his «Famous Voyage» seems to have disgusted even the zeal of his editor. But, in marking these faults, I was far from meaning to assail the well-earned reputation of «Rare Ben Jonson,» who could well afford to be guilty of these sins against decorum, while his writings afford so strong and masculine a support to the cause of virtue and religion.

tant Poet, T. S. by the author of Absalom and Achitophel,» which was published 4th October, 1682. Richard Flecknoe, from whom the piece takes its title, was so distinguished as a wretched poet, that his name had become almost proverbial. Shadwell is represented as the adopted son of this venerable monarch, who so long

> «In prose and verse was own'd without dispute,
> Through all the realms of Nonsense absolute.»

The solemn inauguration of Shadwell, as his successor in this drowsy kingdom, forms the plan of the poem; being the same which Pope afterwards adopted on a broader canvass for his «Dunciad.» The vices and follies of Shadwell are not concealed, while the awkwardness of his pretensions to poetical fame are held up to the keenest ridicule. In an evil hour, leaving the composition of low comedy, in which he held an honourable station, he adventured upon the composition of operas and pastorals. On these the satirist falls without mercy; and ridicules, at the same time, his pretensions to copy Ben Jonson:

> «Nor let false friends seduce thy mind to fame,
> By arrogating Jonson's hostile name;
> Let father Flecknoe fire thy mind with praise,
> And uncle Ogleby thy envy raise.
> Thou art my blood, where Jonson has no part:
> What share have we in nature or in art?

> Where did his wit on learning fix a brand,
> And rail at arts he did not understand?
> Where made he love in 'Prince Nicander's' vein,
> Or swept the dust in 'Psyche's' humble strain?»

This unmerciful satire was sold off in a very short time; and it seems uncertain whether it was again published until 1684, when it appeared with the author's name in Tonson's first Miscellany. It would seem that Dryden did not at first avow it, though, as the title-page assigned it to the author of «Absalom and Achitophel,» we cannot believe Shadwell's assertion, that he had denied it with oaths and imprecations. Dryden, however, omits this satire in the printed list of his plays and poems, along with the Eulogy on Cromwell. But he was so far from disowning it, that, in his «Essay on Satire,» he quotes «Mac-Flecknoe» as an instance given by himself of the Varronian satire. Poor Shadwell was extremely disturbed by this attack upon him; the more so, as he seems hardly to have understood its tendency. He seriously complains, that he is represented by Dryden as an Irishman, «when he knows that I never saw Ireland till I was three-and-twenty years old, and was there but for four months.» He had understood Dryden's parable literally; so true it is, that a knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear.

«Mac-Flecknoe,» though so cruelly severe, was not the only notice which Shadwell re-

ceived of Dryden's displeasure at his person and politics. « Absalom and Achitophel,» and « The Medal,» having been so successful, a second part to the first poem was resolved on, for the purpose of sketching the minor characters of the contending factions. Dryden, probably conceiving that he had already done his part, only revised this additional book, and contributed about two hundred lines. The body of the poem was written by Nahum Tate, one of those second-rate bards, who, by dint of pleonasm and expletive, can find smooth lines if any one will supply them with ideas. The Second Part of « Absalom and Achitophel» is, however, much beyond his usual pitch, and exhibits considerable marks of a careful revision by Dryden, especially in the satirical passages; for the eulogy on the Tory chiefs is in the flat and feeble strain of Tate himself, as is obvious when it is compared with the description of the Green-Dragon Club, the character of Corah, and other passages exhibiting marks of Dryden's hand.

But if the Second Part of « Absalom and Achitophel» fell below the First in its general tone, the celebrated passage inserted by Dryden possessed even a double portion of the original spirit. The victims whom he selected out of the partisans of Monmouth and Shaftesbury, for his own particular severity, were Robert Ferguson, afterwards well known by

the name of The Plotter; Forbes; Johnson, author of the parallel between James, Duke of York, and Julian the Apostate; but, above all, Settle and Shadwell, whom, under the names of Doeg and Og, he has depicted in the liveliest colours his poignant satire could afford. They who have patience to look into the lampoons which these worthies had published against Dryden will, in reading his retort, be reminded of the combats between the giants and knights of romance. His antagonists came on with infinite zeal and fury, discharged their ill-aimed blows on every side, and exhausted their strength in violent and ineffectual rage. But the keen and tranchant blade of Dryden never makes a thrust in vain, and never strikes but at a vulnerable point. This we have elsewhere remarked is a peculiar attribute of his satire; and it is difficult for one assailed on a single ludicrous foible, to make good his respectability, though possessed of a thousand valuable qualities; as it was impossible for Achilles, invulnerable every where else, to survive the wound which a dexterous archer had aimed at his heel. With regard to Settle, there is a contempt in Dryden's satire which approaches almost to good-humour, and plainly shows how far our poet was now from entertaining those apprehensions of rivalship, which certainly dictated his portion of the «Remarks on the Empress of Morocco.» Settle had now

found his level, and Dryden no longer regarded him with a mixture of rage and apprehension, but with more appropriate feelings of utter contempt. This poor wight had acquired by practice, and perhaps from nature, more of a poetical ear than most of his contemporaries were gifted with. «His blundering melody,» as Dryden terms it, is far sweeter to the ear than the flat and ineffectual couplets of Tate; nor are his verses always destitute of something approaching to poetic fancy and spirit. He certainly, in his transposition of «Absalom and Achitophel,» mimicked the harmony of his original with more success than was attained by Shadwell, Buckingham, or Pordage. But in this facility of versification all his merit began and ended; in our author's phrase,

«Doeg, though without knowing how or why,
Made still a blundering kind of melody;
Spurr'd boldly on, and dash'd through thick and thin,
Through sense and nonsense, never out nor in;
Free from all meaning, whether good or bad,
And, in one word, heroically mad.
He was too warm on picking-work to dwell,
But faggotted his notions as they fell,
And, if they rhymed and rattled, all was well.»

Ere we take leave of Settle, it is impossible to omit mentioning his lamentable conclusion; a tale often told and moralized upon, and in truth a piece of very tragical mirth. Elkanah, we have seen, was at this period a zealous

Whig; nay, he was so far in the confidence of Shaftesbury, that, under his direction, and with his materials, he had been entrusted to compose a noted libel against the Duke of York, entitled, «The Character of a Popish Successor.» Having a genius for mechanics, he was also exalted to the manager of a procession for burning the Pope; which the Whigs celebrated with great pomp, as one of many artifices to inflame the minds of the people. To this, and to the fire-works which attended its solemnization, Dryden alludes in the lines to which Elkanah's subsequent disasters gave an air of prophecy:

«In fire-works give him leave to vent his spite,
Those are the only serpents he can write;
The height of his ambition is, we know,
But to be master of a puppet-show;
On that one stage his works may yet appear,
And a month's harvest keeps him all the year.»

Notwithstanding the rank he held among the Whig authors,[1] Settle, perceiving the cause of his patron Shaftesbury was gradually becoming weaker, fairly abandoned him to his

[1] In a satire against Settle, dated April 1682, entitled, «A Character of the True-blue Protestant Poet,» the author exclaims, «One would believe it almost incredible, that any out of Bedlam should think it possible, a yesterday's fool, an errant knave, a despicable coward, and a prophane atheist, should be termed to-day by the same persons, a Cowley, a man of honour, an hero, and a zealous upholder of the Protestant cause and interest.»

fate, and read a solemn recantation of his political errors in a narrative published in 1683. The truth seems to be, that honest Doeg was poet-laureat to the city, and earned some emolument by composing verses for pageants and other occasions of civic festivity; so that when the Tory interest resumed its ascendancy among the magistrates, he had probably no alternative but to relinquish his principles or his post, and Elkanah, like many greater men, held the former the easier sacrifice. Like all converts, he became outrageous in his new faith, wrote a libel on Lord Russell a few days after his execution; indited a panegyric on Judge Jefferies; and, being *tam Marte quam Mercurio*, actually joined as a trooper the army which King James encamped upon Hounslow Heath. After the Revolution, he is enumerated, with our author and Tate, among those poets whose strains had been stifled by that great event.[1]

[1] In the «Deliverance,» an address to the Prince of Orange, published about 9th February, 1689:

> «Alas! the famous Settle, Durfey, Tate,
> That early propp'd the deep intrigues of state,
> Dull Whiggish lines the world could ne'er applaud,
> While your swift genius did appear abroad:
> And thou, great Bayes, whose yet unconquer'd pen
> Wrote with strange force as well of beasts as men,
> Whose noble genius grieved from afar,
> Because new worlds for Bayes did not appear,
> Now to contend with the ambitious elf,
> Begins a civil war against himself,» etc.

He continued, however, to be the city-laureat;[1] but, in despite of that provision, was reduced by want to write plays, like Ben Jonson's Littlewit, for the prophane *motions*, or puppet-shows, of Smithfield and Bartholomew fairs. Nay, having proceeded thus far in exhibiting the truth of Dryden's prediction, he actually mounted the stage in person among these wooden performers, and combated St George for England in a green dragon of his own proper device. Settle was admitted into the Charter-House in his old age, and died there in 1723, The lines of Pope on poor Elkanah's fate are familiar to every poetical reader:

«In Lud's old walls though long I ruled, renown'd
Far as loud Bow's stupendous bells resound;
Though my own aldermen conferr'd the bays,
To me committing their eternal praise,
Their full-fed heroes, their pacific mayors,
Their annual trophies, and their monthly wars;
Though long my party built on me their hopes,
For writing pamphlets, and for roasting popes;
Yet lo! in me what authors have to brag on!
Reduced at last to hiss in my own dragon.
Avert it, Heaven! that thou, or Cibber, e'er
Should wag a serpent-tail in Smithfield fair!
Like the vile straw that 's blown about the streets,
The needy poet sticks to all he meets;
Coach'd, carted, trod upon, now loose, now fast,
And carried off in some dog's tail at last.»

[1] In 1702, probably in the capacity of civic-laureat, he wrote «*Carmen Irenicum*,» upon the union of the two East India companies; and long afterward, in 1717, he is mentioned by Dennis as still the city poet. See p. 171.

As Dryden was probably more apprehensive of Shadwell, who, though a worse poet than Settle, has excelled even Dryden in the lower walks of comedy, he has treated him with sterner severity. His person, his morals, his manners, and his politics, all that had escaped or been but slightly touched upon in «Mac-Flecknoe, are bitterly reviewed in the character of Og; and there probably never existed another poet, who, at the distance of a month, which intervened between the publication of the two poems, could resume an exhausted theme with an energy which gave it all the charms of novelty. Shadwell did not remain silent beneath the lash; but his clamorous exclamations only tended to make his castigation more ludicrous.[1]

The Second Part of «Absalom and Achitophel» was followed by the «*Religio Laici*,» a poem which Dryden published in the same month of November 1682. Its tendency, although of a political nature, is so different from that of the satires, that it will be most properly considered when we can place it in contrast to the «Hind and Panther.» It was addressed to Henry Dickinson, a young gentleman, who had just published a translation

[1] He published a translation of the tenth satire of Juvenal, in the preface to which he rails plentifully against Dryden.

of Simon's Critical History of the New Testament.»

As the publication of the two Parts of «Absalom and Achitophel,» «The Medal,» and «MacFlecknoe,» all of a similar tone, and rapidly succeeding each other, gave to Dryden, hitherto chiefly known as a dramatist, the formidable character of an inimitable satirist, we may here pause to consider their effect upon English poetry. The witty Bishop Hall had first introduced into our literature that species of poetry; which, though its legitimate use be to check vice and expose folly, is so often applied by spleen or by faction to destroy domestic happiness, by assailing private character. Hall possessed a good ear for harmony; and living in the reign of Elizabeth, might have studied it in Spenser, Fairfax, and other models. But from system, rather than ignorance or inability, he chose to be «hard of conceit, and harsh of style,» in order that his poetry might correspond with the sharp, sour, and crabbed nature of his theme.[1] Donne, his successor, was still

[1] I infer, that the want of harmony was intentional, from these expressions: «It is not for every one to relish a true and natural satire; being of itself, besides the nature and inbred bitterness and tartness of particulars, both hard of conceit and harsh of style, and therefore cannot but be unpleasing both to the unskilful and over-musical ear; the one being affected with only a shallow and easy, the other with a smooth and current, disposition.»—*Postscript to Hall's Satires.*

more rugged in his versification, as well as more obscure in his conceptions and allusions. The satires of Cleveland (as we have indeed formerly noticed) are, if possible, still harsher and more strained in expression than those of Donne. Butler can hardly be quoted as an example of the sort of satire we are treating of. «Hudibras» is a burlesque tale, in which the measure is intentionally and studiously rendered as ludicrous as the characters and incidents. Oldham, who flourished in Dryden's time, and enjoyed his friendship, wrote his satires in the crabbed tone of Cleveland and Donne. Dryden, in the copy of verses dedicated to his memory, alludes to this deficiency, and seems to admit the subject as an apology:

> « O early ripe! to thy abundant store
> What could advancing age have added more!
> It might (what Nature never gives the young)
> Have taught the numbers of thy native tongue.
> But satire needs not those, and wit will shine
> Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line. »

Yet the apology which he admitted for Oldham, Dryden disdained to make use of himself. He did not, as has been said of Horace, wilfully untune his harp when he commenced satirist. Aware that a wound may be given more deeply with a burnished than with a rusty blade, he bestowed upon the versification of his satires the same pains which he had given to his rhyming plays and

serious poems. He did not, indeed, for that would have been pains misapplied, attempt to smooth his verses into the harmony of those in which he occasionally celebrates female beauty; but he gave them varied tone, correct rhyme, and masculine energy, all which had hitherto been strangers to the English satire. Thus, while Dryden's style resembled that of Juvenal rather than Horace, he may claim a superiority, for uniform and undeviating dignity, over the Roman satirist. The age, whose appetite for scandal had been profusely fed by lampoons and libels, now learned, that there was a more elevated kind of satire, in which poignancy might be united with elegance, and energy of thought with harmony of versification. The example seems to have produced a strong effect. No poet, not even Settle (for even the worst artist will improve from beholding a masterpiece), afterwards conceived he had sufficiently accomplished his task by presenting to the public thoughts, however witty or caustic he might deem them, clothed in the hobbling measure of Donne or Cleveland; and expression and harmony began to be consulted, in satire, as well as sarcastic humour or powerful illustration.

« Mac-Flecknoe, » in some degree, differs from the other satires which Dryden published at this time. It is not confined to the de-

scription of character, but exhibits an imaginary course of incidents, in which the principal personage takes a ludicrous share. In this it resembles «Hudibras;» and both are quoted by Dryden himself as examples of the Varronian satire. But there was this pointed difference, that Butler's poem is burlesque, and Dryden's mock-heroic. «Mac-Flecknoe» is, I rather believe, the first poem in the English language, in which the dignity of a harmonized and lofty style is employed, not only to excite pleasure in itself, but to increase, by contrast, the comic effect of the scenes which it narrates; the subject being ludicrous, while the verse is noble. The models of satire afforded by Dryden, as they have never been equalled by any succeeding poet, were in a tone of excellence, superior far to all that had preceded them.

These reflections on the nature of Dryden's satires have, in some degree, interrupted our account of his poetical controversies. Not only did he pour forth these works, one after another, with a fertility which seemed to imply delight in his new labour; but, as if the spirit of the time had taught him speed, he found leisure to oppose the Whigs in the theatre, where the audience was now nearly as much divided as the kingdom by the contending factions. Settle had produced the tragedy of «Pope Joan,» Shadwell the co-

medy of the «Lancashire Witches,» to expose to hatred and ridicule the religion of the successor to the crown. Otway and D'Urfey, Crowne and Southerne, names unequal in fame, vied in producing plays against the Whigs, which might counterbalance the effect of these popular dramas. A licence similar to that of Aristophanes was introduced on the English stage; and living personages were exhibited under very slight disguises.[1] In the prologues and epilogues, which then served as a sort of moral to the plays, the veil, thin as it was, was completely raised, and the political analogies pointed out to such of the audience as might otherwise have been too dull to apprehend them. In this sharp though petty war, Dryden bore a considerable share. His necessities obliged him, among other modes of increasing his income, to ac-

[1] In «Venice Preserved,» the character of the foolish senator Antonio, now judiciously omitted in the representation, was said to be meant for Shaftesbury. But Crowne's «City Politics» contained the most barefaced exhibition of all the popular leaders, including Shaftesbury, College the Protestant joiner, Titus Oates, and Sir William Jones. The last is described under the character of Bartoline, with the same lisping imperfect enunciation which distinguished the original. Let us remark, however, to the honour of Charles II., that in «Sir Courtly Nice,» another comedy which Crowne, by his express command, imitated from the Spanish, the furious Tory is ridiculed in the character of Hothead, as well as the fanatical Whig under that of Testimony.

cept of a small pecuniary tribute for furnishing prologues on remarkable occasions, or for new plays; and his principles determined their tendency. But this was not all the support which his party expected, and which he afforded them on the theatre, even while labouring in their service in a different department.

When Dryden had but just finished his «*Religio Laici*,» Lee, who had assisted in the play of «OEdipus,» claimed Dryden's promise to requite the obligation. It has been already noticed, that Dryden had, in the year succeeding the Restoration, designed a play on the subject of the Duke of Guise; and he has informed us he had preserved one or two of the scenes. These, therefore, were revised, and inserted in the new play, of which Dryden wrote the first scene, the whole fourth act, and great part of the fifth. Lee composed the rest of «The Duke of Guise.» The general parallel between the League in France and the Covenant in England was too obvious to escape early notice; but the return of Monmouth to England against the king's express command, in order to head the opposition, perhaps the insurrection, of London, presented a still closer analogy to the entry of the Duke of Guise into Paris, under similar circumstances, on the famous day of the barricades. Of this remarkable

incident, the united authors of «The Duke of Guise» naturally availed themselves; though with such precaution, that almost the very expressions of the scene are taken from the prose of Davila. Yet the plot, though capable of an application so favourable for the royal party, contained circumstances of offence to it. If the parallel between Guise and Monmouth was on the one hand felicitous, as pointing out the nature of the Duke's designs, the moral was revolting, as seeming to recommend the assassination of Charles's favourite son. The king also loved Monmouth to the very last; and was slow and reluctant in permitting his character to be placed in a criminal or odious point of view.[1] The play, therefore, though ready for exhibition before midsummer 1682, remained in the hands of Arlington the lord-chamberlain for two months, without being licensed for representation. But during that time the scene darkened. The king had so far suppressed his tenderness for Monmouth, as to authorize his arrest at Stafford; and the influence of the Duke of York at court

[1] The concealed partiality of Charles towards Monmouth survived even the discovery of the Rye-House plot. He could not dissemble his satisfaction upon seeing him after his surrender, and pressed his hand affectionately.—See Monmouth's Diary in *Wellwood's Memorials*, p. 322.

became daily more predominant. Among other evident tokens that no measures were henceforward to be kept between the king and Monmouth, the representation of «The Duke of Guise» was at length authorized.

The two companies of players, after a long and expensive warfare, had now united their forces; on which occasion Dryden furnished them with a prologue, full of violent Tory principles. By this united company «The Duke of Guise» was performed on the 30th December, 1682. It was printed with a dedication to Hyde, Earl of Rochester, subscribed by both authors, but evidently the work of Dryden. It is written in a tone of defiance to the Whig authors, who had assailed the dedicators, it alleges, «like footpads in the dark,» though their blows had done little harm, and the objects of their malice yet lived to vindicate their loyalty in open day. The play itself has as determined a political character as the dedication. Besides the general parallel between the leaguers and the fanatical sectaries, and the more delicate, though not less striking, connexion between the story of Guise and of Monmouth, there are other collateral allusions in the piece to the history of that unfortunate nobleman, and to the state of parties. The whole character of Marmoutiere, high-spirited, loyal, and exerting all her influence

to deter Guise from the prosecution of his dangerous schemes, corresponds to that of Anne, Duchess of Monmouth.[1] The love too which the king professes to Marmoutiere, and which excites the jealousy of Guise, may bear a remote and delicate allusion to that partiality which the Duke of York is said to have entertained for the wife of his nephew.[2] The amiable colours

[1] Carte, in his «Life of the Duke of Ormond,» says, that Monmouth's resolutions varied from submission to resistance against the king, according to his residence with the Duchess at Moor-park, who schooled him to the former course, or with his associates and partisans in the city, who instigated him to more desperate resolutions.

[2] This Dryden might learn from Mulgrave, who mentions in his Memoirs, as a means of Monmouth's advancement, the «great friendship which the Duke of York had openly professed to his wife, a lady of wit and reputation, who had both the ambition of making her husband considerable, and the address of succeeding in it, by using her interest in so friendly an uncle, whose design I believe was only to convert her. Whether this familiarity of theirs was contrived or only connived at by the Duke of Monmouth himself, is hard to determine. But I remember, that after these two princes had become declared enemies, the Duke of York one day told me, with some emotion, as conceiving it a new mark of his nephew's insolence, that he had forbidden his wife to receive any more visits from him; at which I could not help frankly replying that I, who was not used to excuse him, yet could not hold from doing it in that case, wishing his highness might have no juster cause to complain

in which Marmoutiere is painted, were due to the Duchess of Monmouth, Dryden's especial patroness. Another more obvious and more offensive parallel existed between the popular party in the city, with the Whig sheriffs at their head, and that of the *Echevins*, or sheriffs of Paris, violent demagogues and adherents to the League, and who, in the play, are treated with great contumely by Grillon and the royal guards. The tumults which had taken place, at the election of these magistrates, were warm in the recollection of the city; and the commitment of the ex-sheriffs, Shute and Pilkington, to the Tower, under pretext of a riot, was considered as the but of the poet's satire. Under these impressions the Whigs made a violent opposition to the representation of the piece, even when the king gave it his personal countenance. And although, in despite of them, «The Duke of Guise» so far succeeded, as «to be frequently acted, and

of him. Upon which the duke, surprised to find me excuse his and my own enemy, changed the discourse immediately.»—*Memoirs*, p. 13.

I have perused letters from Sir Gideon Scott of Highchester to the Duchess of Monmouth, recommending a prudent and proper attention to the Duke of York: and this advice she probably followed; for, after her husband's execution, James restored to her all her family estates. Sir Gideon's son had been married to the Duchess' eldest sister.

never without a considerable attendance,» we may conclude from these qualified expressions of the author himself, that the play was never eminently popular. He who writes for a party can only please at most one half of his audience.

It was not to be expected that, at a time so very critical, a public representation, including such bold allusions, or rather parallels, should pass without critical censure. «The Duke of Guise» was attacked by Dryden's old foe Shadwell, in some verses, entitled, «A Lenten Prologue refused by the Players;[1] and more formally, in «Reflexions on the pretended Parallel in the play called the Duke of Guise.» In this pamphlet Shadwell seems to have been assisted by a gentleman of the Temple, so zealous for the popular cause, that Dryden says he was detected disguised in a livery-gown, proffering his vote at the Common-hall. Thomas Hunt, a barrister,[2] likewise stepped forth on this occasion; and in his «Defence of the Charter of London,»

[1] Bought by Mr Luttrell, 11th April, 1688. It is expressly levelled against the «Duke of Guise,» and generally against Dryden as a court poet. I may, however, be wrong in ascribing it to Shadwell.

[2] I observe Anthony Wood, as well as Mr Malone, suppose Hunt and the Templar associated in the Reflections to be the same person. But in the «Vindication of the Duke of Guise,» Shadwell and they are spoken of as three distinct persons.

then challenged by the famous process of *Quo Warranto*, he accuses Dryden of having prepared the way for that arbitrary step, by the degrading representation of their magistrates executed in effigy upon the stage. Dryden thought these pamphlets of consequence enough to deserve an answer, and published, soon after, «The Vindication of the Duke of Guise.» In perusing the controversy, we may admire two circumstances, eminently characteristic of the candour with which such controversies are usually maintained: First, the anxiety with which the critics labour to fix upon Dryden a disrespectful parallel between Charles II. and Henry II. of France, which certainly our author did not propose to carry farther than their common point of situation; and secondly, the labour with which he disavows what he unquestionably did intend,—a parallel between the rebellious conduct of Monmouth and of Guise. The Vindication is written in a tone of sovereign contempt for the adversaries, particularly for Shadwell. Speaking of Thomas Hunt, Dryden says,—«Even this their celebrated writer knows no more of style and English than the Northern dictator; as if dulness and clumsiness were fatal to the name of *Tom*. It is true, he is a fool in three languages more than the poet; for, they say, 'he understands

Latin, Greek, and Hebrew,' from all which, to my certain knowledge, I acquit the other. Og may write against the king, if he pleases, so long as he drinks for him, and his writings will never do the government so much harm as his drinking does it good; for true subjects will not be much perverted by his libels; but the wine-duties rise considerably by his claret. He has often called me an atheist in print; I would believe more charitably of him, and that he only goes the broad way, because the other is too narrow for him. He may see, by this, I do not delight to meddle with his course of life, and his immoralities, though I have a long bead-roll of them. I have hitherto contented myself with the ridiculous part of him, which is enough, in all conscience, to employ one man; even without the story of his late fall at the Old Devil, where he broke no ribs, because the hardness of the stairs could reach no bones; and, for my part, I do not wonder how he came to fall, for I have always known him heavy: the miracle is, how he got up again. I have heard of a sea captain as fat as he, who, to escape arrests, would lay himself flat upon the ground, and let the bailiffs carry him to prison if they could. If a messenger or two, nay, we may put in three or four, should come, he has friendly advertisement

how to escape them. But to leave him, who is not worth any further consideration, now I have done laughing at him,—would every man knew his own talent, and that they, who are only born for drinking, would let both poetry and prose alone!» This was the last distinct and prolonged animadversion which our author bestowed upon his corpulent antagonist.

Soon after this time Dryden wrote a biographical preface to Plutarch's Lives, of which a new translation, by several hands, was in the press. The dedication is addressed to the Duke of Ormond, the Barzillai of « Absalom and Achitophel,» whom Charles, after a long train of cold and determined neglect, had in emergency recalled to his favour and his councils. The first volume of Plutarch's Lives, with Dryden's Life of the author, appeared in 1683.

About the same time, the king's express command engaged Dryden in a work, which may be considered as a sort of illustration of the doctrines laid down in the « Vindication of the Duke of Guise.» It was the translation of Maimbourg's « History of the League,» expressly composed to draw a parallel between the Huguenots of France and the Leaguers, as both equal enemies of the monarchy. This comparison was easily transferred to the sectaries of England, and the association proposed

by Shaftesbury. The work was published with unusual solemnity of title-page and frontispiece; the former declaring, that the translation was made by his majesty's command; the latter representing Charles on his throne, surrounded by emblems expressive of hereditary and indefeasible right.[1] The dedication to the king contains sentiments which savour strongly of party violence, and even ferocity. The forgiving disposition of the king is, according to the dedicator, the encouragement of the conspirators. Like Antæus, they rise refreshed from a simple overthrow. « These sons of earth are never to be trusted in their mother element; they must be hoisted into the air, and strangled.» Thus exasperated were the most gentle tempers in those times of doubt and peril. The rigorous tone adopted confirms the opinion of those historians who observe, that, after the discovery of the Rye-house Plot, Charles was fretted out of his usual debonair ease, and became more morose and severe than had been hitherto thought consistent with his disposition.

This translation was to be the last service which Dryden was to render his good-hu-

[1] In this edition I have retained a specimen of a translation, which our author probably executed with peculiar care; selecting it from the account of the barricade of Paris, as illustrating the tragedy of the « Duke of Guise. »

moured, selfish, and thoughtless patron. While the laureat was preparing for the stage the opera of « Albion and Albanius,» intended to solemnize the triumph of Charles over the Whigs, or, as the author expressed it, the double restoration of his sacred majesty, the king died of an apoplexy upon the 6th February, 1684-5. His death opened to many, and to Dryden among others, new hopes, and new prospects, which were, in his instance, doomed to terminate in disappointment and disgrace. We may therefore pause, and review the private life of the poet during the period which has occupied our last sections.

The vigour and rapidity with which Dryden poured forth his animated satire plainly intimates, that his mind was pleased with the exercise of that formidable power. It was more easy for him, he has himself told us, to write with severity, than with forbearance; and indeed, where is the expert swordsman who does not delight in the flourish of his weapon? Neither could this self-complacent feeling be much allayed by the vague and abusive ribaldry with which his satire was repaid. This was natural to the controversy, was no more than he expected, and was easily retorted with treble interest. « As for knave,» says he, « and sycophant, and rascal, and impudent, and devil, and old serpent, and a thousand such good morrows, I take them to

be only names of parties; and could return murderer, and cheat, and whig-napper, and sodomite; and, in short, the goodly number of the seven deadly sins, with all their kindred and relations, which are names of parties too; but saints will be saints, in spite of villainy.» With such feelings, we may believe Dryden's rest was little disturbed by the litter of libels against him :—

> « Sons of a day just buoyant on the flood,
> Then number'd with the puppies in the mud. »

But he who keenly engages in political controversy must not only encounter the vulgar abuse, which he may justly contemn, but the altered eye of friends, whose regard is chilled, or alienated. That Dryden sustained such misfortune we cannot doubt, when he informs us that, out of the large party in opposition, comprehending, doubtless, many men of talent and eminence, who were formerly familiar with him, he had during the course of a whole year only spoken to four, and to those but casually and cursorily, and only to express a wish, that the times might come when the names of Whig and Tory might be abolished, and men live together as they had done before they were introduced.

Neither did the protecting zeal of his party-friends compensate for the loss of those whom

Dryden had alienated in their service. True it is, that a host of Tory rhymers came forward with complimentary verses to the author of « Absalom and Achitophel,» and of « The Medal.» But of all payment, that in kind is least gratifying to a poverty-struck bard, and the courtly patrons of Dryden were in no haste to make him more substantial requital. A gratuity of an hundred broad pieces is said to have been paid him by Charles for one of his satires; but no permanent provision was made for him. He was coolly left to increase his pittance by writing occasional pieces; and it was probably with this view that he arranged for publication a miscellaneous collection of poetry, which he afterwards continued. It was published for Tonson in 1683-4, and contained several versions of Epistles from Ovid, and translations of detached pieces of Virgil, Horace, and Theocritus, with some smaller pieces by Dryden himself, and a variety of poems by other hands. The epistles had appeared in 1680, in a version of the original by several hands, to which Dryden also contributed an introductory discourse on translation. Contrary to our author's custom, the miscellany appeared without either preface or dedication.

The miscellany, among other minor poems of Dryden, contained many of his occasional

prologues and epilogues, the composition of which his necessity had rendered so important a branch of income, that, in the midst of his splendour of satirical reputation, the poet was obliged to chaffer about the scanty recompense which he drew from such petty sources. Such a circumstance attended the commencement of his friendship with Southerne. That poet then opening his dramatic career with the play of the « Loyal Brother,» came, as was usual, to request a prologue from Dryden, and to offer him the usual compliment of five guineas. But the laureat demurred, and insisted upon double the sum; « not out of disrespect,» he added, « to you, young man; but the players have had my goods too cheap.» Hence Southerne, who was peculiarly fortunate in his dramatic revenue, is designed by Pope as

> ——« Tom sent down to raise
> The price of prologues and of plays. »

It may seem surprising that Dryden should be left to make an object of such petty gains, when, labouring for the service of government, he had in little more than twelve months produced both Parts of « Absalom and Achitophel,» « The Medal,» « Mac-Flecknoe,» « *Religio Laici*,» and « The Duke of Guise.» But this was not the worst; for, although his

pension as poet-laureat was apparently all the encouragement which he received from the crown, so ill-regulated were the finances of Charles, so expensive his pleasures, and so greedy his favourites, that our author, shortly after finishing these immortal poems, was compelled to sue for more regular payment of that very pension, and for a more permanent provision, in the following affecting Memorial, addressed to Hyde, Earl of Rochester :—« I would plead,» says he, « a little merit, and some hazards of my life from the common enemies; my refusing advantages offered by them, and neglecting my beneficial studies, for the king's service; but I only think I merit not to starve. I never applied myself to any interest contrary to your lordship's; and, on some occasions, perhaps not known to you, have not been unserviceable to the memory and reputation of my lord, your father.[1] After this, my lord, my conscience assures me, I may write boldly, though I cannot speak to you. I have three sons, growing to man's estate. I breed them all up to learning, beyond my fortune; but they are too hopeful to be neglected, though I want. Be pleased to look on me with an eye of compassion : some

[1] Probably alluding to the author having defended Clarendon in public company; for nothing of the kind occurs in Dryden's publications.

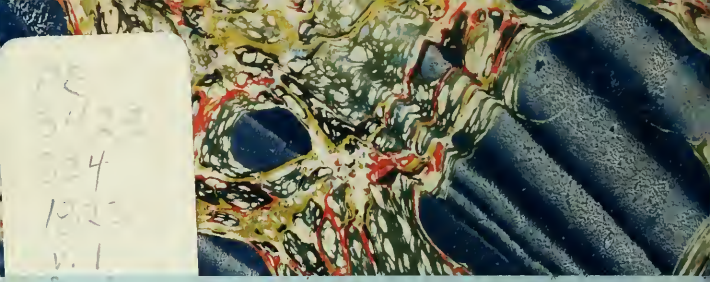
small employment would render my condition easy. The King is not unsatisfied of me; the Duke has often promised me his assistance; and your lordship is the conduit through which their favours pass. Either in the customs, or the appeals of the excise, or some other way, means cannot be wanting, if you please to have the will. *'Tis enough for one age to have neglected Mr Cowley, and starved Mr Butler;* but neither of them had the happiness to live till your lordship's ministry. In the mean time, be pleased to give me a gracious and a speedy answer to my present request of half a year's pension for my necessities. I am going to write somewhat by his Majesty's command,[1] and cannot stir into the country for my health and studies till I secure my family from want.»

We know that this affecting remonstrance was in part successful; for long afterwards, he says, in allusion to this period, « Even from a bare treasury, my success has been contrary to that of Mr Cowley; and Gideon's fleece has there been moistened, when all the ground was dry.» But in the admission of this claim to the more regular payment of his pension, was comprehended all Rochester's title to Dryden's gratitude. The poet could not obtain

[1] Probably the translation of «*Religio Laici.*»

the small employment which he so earnestly solicited; and such was the recompense of the merry monarch and his counsellors, to one whose productions had strengthened the pillars of his throne, as well as renovated the literary taste of the nation.

END OF VOL. I.



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